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CYRILLA.



Mary Johnston
~~CYRILLA.~~

A Novel.

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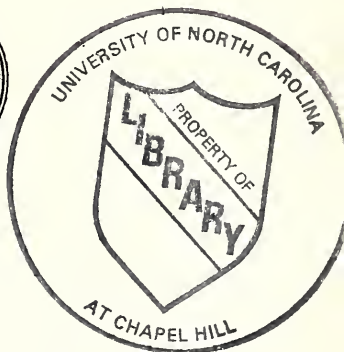
BARONESS TAUTPHOEUS,

AUTHOR OF "THE INITIALS."

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"Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women."

ESDRAS, iv. 27.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1872.

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PREFACE.



THIS novel was originally founded upon facts, which culminated in the chapters that formed the conclusion of the first edition of the work. At the recommendation of judicious friends, who considered these facts detrimental to the fiction, all reference to them has been omitted in the present edition, and it is to be hoped that the change will be considered an improvement.

Munich,

Sept. 1872.





CYRILLA.

CHAPTER I.

HUNDREDS of English travellers pass through Salzburg every summer—many of them having previously gone over a considerable portion of this earth's periphery in that silent business-like manner which, on the continent of Europe, is supposed to be peculiar to their nation; not a few, after having arrived at the melancholy conviction, that they have already seen too much to be surprised or particularly pleased by any country left for them to explore. Yet the feelings must be blunted in an unusual degree, if that most beautifully situated town make no lasting impression on the mind, when seen in all the glory of an unclouded summer's day. The range of mountains that form the horizon, and from which the snow seldom altogether disappears, is near enough to realize in a few hours the dreams of the most imaginative pedestrian, in gigantic rocks, thundering torrents, dark lakes, and narrow secluded valleys. Mountains, too, are the natural fortifications of the town itself, the solid rock forming a part in the construction of many of the houses, while forest trees grow luxuriantly among the crags above their roofs.

Salzburg in summer, and Salzburg in winter, present, however, very different aspects. The surrounding scenery is unfit for enjoyment; we perceive that the streets are narrow, the houses high, that the mountains diminish the hours of light and sunshine, and seem in their monotonous whiteness like shrouded giants about to encircle us in their frozen arms. The beautiful marble fountain in the Dom Platz is covered up with wooden planks to defend it from the frost; the exotic plants that luxuriated at all the windows have been withdrawn; deep snow lies on the ground, not, however, wet and slippery as we know it in England, but dry, hard, crisp, and crystallized; and a stranger might watch with interest the various kinds of sledges, from those on which the loaded waggon slides gratingly, its team of horses well furnished with sonorous bells, to the lighter vehicles that, gliding noiselessly along, convey the fruit and vegetables to market, the fur-capped children to school, or the capacious basket of a laundress to its destination.

The mixture of monks and military is also a peculiarity that strikes immediately. With the former we have nothing to do, with the latter somewhat—that is, if the reader will consent to retrograde some twenty years in imagination, and spend a winter day in Salzburg towards the end of the year 18 . Crossing the bridge over the Salzach at an early hour in the morning, a turn to the left will lead into a narrow street not far distant from the palace of Mirabel, containing several large massively built houses: over the gateway of one of them a well-known coat of arms hewn in stone is conspicuous, the coronet and savage upon it being, it is true, rather weather-beaten and in some places defective, but, like the tattered colours of a regiment that has seen service, the increase of these defects only serve to add to its value in the estimation of its possessors.

This house was built by Rudolph Baron von Walden auf Waldenburg in the seventeenth century, and since repaired, altered, and enlarged, by his successors at different periods; which interesting facts were recorded on

stones inserted in the walls, that no subsequent yellow, green, or whitewashing of the mansion had ever been suffered to conceal or deface. It was asserted, with every appearance of probability, that the buildings used as stables had been erected by the Romans, and that perhaps treasure, certainly antiquities, might be found, if judicious and determined search were made in the yard and its vicinity.

The Waldens had been an incredulous generation with respect to hidden treasures, and cared for no antiquities, excepting those that immediately concerned their family. It was curious that the first who, roused by curiosity or avarice, had rummaged the family archives for information on the subject, should be deprived in a rather arbitrary manner of his inheritance. Unconscious of the value attached to the house by his only son, Baron Walden had bestowed it on his daughter Olga, as an additional gift the day she had prudently married her cousin, Gottfried von Adlerkron Windhorst, instead of a penniless soldier of fortune to whom she had long been attached. When afterwards, surprised and dismayed at the boundless wrath of his son, Baron Walden would willingly have repurchased his gift at almost any price, nothing could induce Olga to resign a house which, even on her wedding-day, she calmly thought would make a desirable widow-residence for herself hereafter; a house in which the stones spoke more distinctly of the noble race of Walden, than even the excavated tunnel-entrance to the town of its pious architect. A quarrel had naturally ensued between the brother and sister, followed by such intense hatred on the part of the former, that years afterwards, on his death-bed at Waldenburg, he had complained of his unjust disinheritance with all the bitterness of a freshly received injury, rejoiced that his sister was childless, and then enjoined his young son Conrad to purchase the house of his aunt, if she could ever by any means be induced to part with it.

In the meantime, the Baroness, as she had anticipated, became a widow, and in the course of time took up her

abode in the "Walden Haus," as it was called. The faint formal epistolary effort made by her brother's son after his father's decease to commence a correspondence, had proved quite fruitless; she informed him, in a few cold unsympathizing lines, that, "having received the intelligence of her brother's death, she would not refer to the terms on which they had lived, but considered it her duty to inform him now, if he were not already aware of the circumstance, that she had adopted her nephew, Rupert von Adlerkron, and intended to make him, in accordance with the wishes of her late husband, heir to all she possessed." The tone or purport of the letter, perhaps both, prevented any further attempt at conciliation or communication, and the Baroness turned with renewed interest towards Rupert, the last scion of the house of Adlerkron.

As the son of her husband's eldest brother and her own sister, he was doubly her nephew, also, in consequence of former intermarriages in their families, her cousin; to this mixture of relationships she had often alluded, but latterly they had all been sunk in the name of adopted son, and she had for many years made it her chief occupation to amass wealth, hoping with it to purchase that affection and devotion from him, which she had failed to secure by less expensive means at an earlier period. Some other relations had lately begun to occupy her thoughts; they were the children of her husband's youngest brother Carl; but their having been already left a considerable sum of money by her husband, and a bequest of as much more should they marry with her consent, had hitherto caused her to regard them with an undisguised anger and dislike, that nothing but a feeling of daily increasing loneliness could overcome. To this was now added a matrimonial plan for one of them, which had suddenly but completely taken possession of her mind; and this plan with its consequences influenced in so remarkable a manner the whole family, that the Baroness, as the projector of it, must be considered worthy of more attention than so little interesting a person would otherwise deserve, or than perhaps will be quite agreeable to the reader.

Let us mount the time-worn stone staircase on the morning our tale commences, and on the first floor we shall meet her walking towards the small room in which she generally breakfasted. There was an air of stern yet faded grandeur about the interior of the residence, which accorded well with the appearance of the mistress of it; her very dress of *fueille-morte* coloured silk seemed to be of the same date as the sun-bleached red curtains of the ante-room. Such was not however the case: an experienced female eye would have pronounced the scanty morning wrapper to be at least of this century, whereas the furniture and its arrangement but too evidently bore the stamp of a foregoing—not the gorgeous rococo or renaissance, but the stiff insipid style of the Revolution, with all its inelegant angles and so-called antique forms. The effect produced by this furniture in the massive antiquated building was not unlike that of the Baroness' own dress, as it clung to her full figure, which, not above the middle height, inclined very considerably to a degree of fleshiness that might almost be termed corpulency; the smallness of both hands and feet denoted that the proportions had once been finer, and more appropriate to the very handsome face which had successfully braved the wear and tear of an execrable temper and nine-and-forty years. Her dark brow contracted, and an expression of vehement impatience burst from her lips, as, through the negligently closed door of the stove, the bright flames of an unusually large fire met her eyes. She stooped, was for a moment lost in the capacious mouth of the stove, and having then and there ascertained that more wood was being burned than was permitted, she called angrily to a footman evidently attempting an escape, and asked in a very loud voice, who had dared to waste her wood in that extravagant manner.

“I don't know, madam, but I will ask Ursula,” he replied, turning towards a housemaid, who at no great distance was busy at her usual morning work of deluging the uncarpeted corridors, and mopping them dry again, very much in the manner in which the decks of a man-of-war are swabbed. She allowed him to repeat the question of

which she had heard every word, and then answered saucily, "Baron Adlerkron desired me to make a good fire; he says he is frozen in this house—that he has never been warm since he came into it."

The Baroness did not wait to hear the softened repetition of these words, but hastily entered the room, and saw the person who had caused the unnecessary waste of fuel drawing the breakfast-table to the two arm-chairs which he had already placed close to the stove. He was a very tall young man, with fair hair curling thickly round a high white forehead, large light blue eyes, a well-proportioned nose, and a mouth half concealed by mustachios of unusual length, and hair still fairer than the "Hyperian curls" that graced his head. He had probably heard what had been said, for he half laughed, as he looked up for a moment to say "Good morning, aunt," and then again seized the table, unheedful of the clattering cups and tall tottering coffeepot, and continued to drag it towards him.

His aunt laid her hand on his arm, exclaiming, "Not so close to the stove, Rupert, pray—I shall be suffocated!"

He stopped, drew forward a screen, and then, having ensconced himself in a chair, began to eat his breakfast in silence.

"I wish," began his aunt after a pause—"I wish you would consent to remain here one day longer—only one day! Your cousins *must* arrive this evening; I cannot conceive what has delayed them so long."

"It is not difficult to account for the delay," he answered carelessly; "a journey from Italy is not easily made in such weather as this!"

"But they left Italy six weeks ago, and have been staying in Meran; a most unnecessary expense, I must say, for people in their circumstances."

"I thought you said my aunt Sophy had been ill?"

"Oh, not more than she always is—one might almost think that her former mode of life, wandering about after your uncle's regiment, must have been beneficial to her health, notwithstanding all the discomforts to which it

subjected her ; for since he died, and she has been able to live quietly, she has never been well."

"Perhaps grief" . . . began Rupert.

"Ah, bah !—she did not care for him most probably more than I did for your uncle Gottfried,—perhaps not as much ; yet you see how I have got over *his* death, which is even more recent."

Rupert leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and looked up to the ceiling. "While," she continued, "I don't mean to say that they lived unhappily together, they got on as well as the generality of people, I believe ; but you know he had been desperately wounded several times before she married him, and from the time his jaw was shattered, he was perfectly hideous ; besides, she was his second wife, and was such a contrast to the first, that I don't imagine he could have cared much for her, at least we all supposed so. It was your uncle Gottfried and I who arranged the marriage, you know."

"My uncle Gottfried !" said Rupert, with evident surprise ; "I should have thought that money-making was more in his line than match-making."

"Why, yes ; but we were so afraid that Carl would again make a fool of himself, that we were glad to find any one at all eligible disposed to take him. Your aunt Sophy's fortune was small, but the connexion was very desirable, and crippled as he was, after so many campaigns, he had no right to expect either youth or beauty."

"So brave a soldier had a right to expect much," observed Rupert.

"Well, I don't deny his bravery ; but he had faults of the most unpardonable description— he was careless—thoughtless to a degree where money was concerned. You don't know how often your uncle Gottfried had to assist him !"

Rupert knew more about the matter than she did ; but he did not say so.

"It was the only thing we ever seriously quarrelled about, for I always thought and said, that when people incurred debts they should pay them."

Still Rupert was silent, and she continued, "You have no idea what wild habits your uncle Carl contracted during the war; he quite forgot his station in life, and from the time he married that painter's daughter, *Signora* Nina, as they called her, he lived almost exclusively among artists, and actors, and authors, and such people."

"He led a very jolly life for several years," said Rupert. "Every one says his wife was an angel, and with such a child as Melanie must have been"

"Melanie would have been totally spoiled if her mother had not died," cried his aunt pettishly. "Fortunately your uncle Carl attended to our advice, and sent her off to school before he married again. The other two girls have been brought up very differently."

"I know they have," said Rupert, laughing; "my aunt Sophy's drawing-room was a perfect school-room. I have a painful recollection of seeing my little cousin Cyrilla perched on a high stool before a pianoforte, playing some dreadful exercises for the left hand, while the tears streamed over her baby face, and she occasionally wiped them away with her long fair curls."

"So you remember Cyrilla?" cried his aunt quickly.

"As much as a mere boy can remember a mere child; I recollect her shoes particularly well."

"Her shoes!"

"Yes, she used to wear little bronze-coloured shoes, with pink sandals; and once, after she had performed some graceful sort of pantomime with a scarf, I saw her father place her on a table before him and kiss them. I thought at the time I should like vastly to have just such a little child of my own, bronze-coloured shoes and pink sandals inclusive."

"Nonsense, Rupert! You could not have been more than ten or twelve years old at that time."

"And yet I perfectly recollect indulging most innocently in the wish to be a father," said Rupert, holding a newspaper before his face to conceal a smile.

His aunt half laughed, fidgeted on her chair, played with her coffee-spoon, and seemed to hesitate and consider

what she should next say. At this moment the sound of an approaching sledge became audible, and no sooner did the jingling of the bells denote its immediate vicinity, than Rupert sprang up, and throwing wide open the double windows, gave entrance to the cold winter air, and a considerable quantity of snow, while making exaggerated salutations to some one below.

“At last!” exclaimed the Baroness, rising hastily; “at last! Well, I really am glad that they have come before you leave Salzburg, for I must tell you”

What she intended to tell her nephew was inaudible, for the moment she had risen from her chair, with a little more than usual precipitation, four dogs, remarkable for nothing but their diminutive dimensions, commenced snarling and barking with all their might. Totally inattentive to her commands for silence, they first endeavoured to impede her progress across the room, by running over her feet, and then seizing Rupert’s fur-lined dressing-gown, which hung temptingly before them as he leaned out of the window, they tugged at it so successfully that in a few seconds it was torn in several places.

“I don’t hear what you say!” cried Rupert to some one in the street. “Confound these useless curs,” he added, impatiently kicking those nearest him, “it is impossible to hear a word when they are yelping in this way. Where are you to be found?”

“At the barracks. We are going to make a sledging party into Bavaria to-day, to drink Rhine wine—did not Polyak tell you?”

“I did not see him”

“I thought he was the best person to give the message to you, as we all know that he is every day and all day”

Rupert threw back his head and eyes with a significant jerk, the speaker made an odd grimace, and calling out, “I shall expect you in an hour,” drove off.

“I wish you would shut the window, Rupert,” said his aunt pettishly; “it is very cold. I really thought, from your impetuous manner, that it must have been your

cousins you expected to see, and it is only that stupid Count Glaneck."

"An excellent, kind-hearted fellow as ever lived."

"That is more than I can say for you,—you have kicked Amor and Mi-lady unmercifully."

"I did not mean to hurt them, though they provoked me beyond endurance. Come here, Mi-lady. You do not seem to have suffered much from my boot. Affectionate creature! She has turned up her little red eyes to my face—she forgives me. May I not hope that my aunt will also pardon my impatience, or cruelty, or whatever the misdemeanour may be denominated, of which I have been guilty?"

"I think," said his aunt, not quite satisfied at his attempt at contrition, "I think, Rupert, you must purposely try to annoy me. I know you are fond of dogs—all sportsmen are; and yet mine are abused and kicked by you on every possible occasion."

"If they did not bark just when I happen to be speaking, or when other people are speaking, I have no sort of dislike to them, though they *are* useless little brutes."

"Useless little brutes!"

"Why, yes. I don't suppose Mi-lady ever killed a rat in her life; Amor would run away from a mouse; and Jolie and Minkerl are of such doubtful breed, that one hardly knows what they are intended to represent."

"Minkerl is a Russian terrier; his father was Russian and his mother was Russian, and Colonel Bockenheim says he envies me but one thing in the world, and that is—Minkerl."

"Don't believe him. He envies you your thousands and tens of thousands of Austrian florins and Prussian dollars much more! I suspect, too, he intends you to bestow a few of them on his very pretty daughter, or he would never have proposed giving her to you for a companion."

"That was not exactly his intention, but you are not very far from the mark."

"And, pray, what *was* his intention?" asked Rupert carelessly, while he amused himself by placing bits of sugar

on the dogs' noses, which they were not to eat until he had given the word of command. "What *was* his intention?—Steady, Amor! make ready—present—halt—present"

"He knows the large fortune of which you are in actual possession, as well as that, having quarrelled with my brother, you, and you alone, are likely to be my heir. He thought that as you are unmarried, and his daughter as you say very pretty, there was a chance of"

"Fire!" cried Rupert, and the dogs crunched their sugar while he hastily rose, and with a gesture of impatience prepared to leave the room.

"You always avoid this subject, Rupert, though you know very well how much I wish you to leave the army, and"

"I know very well how much you wished me to enter it a few years ago."

"Yes, when you wanted to travel in the East; but now that you are older and steadier, I wish you to marry and settle at Windhorst. Colonel Bockenheim says you would be more manageable if you had a few debts, and I believe he is right; not that I exactly wish you to have pecuniary embarrassments like other young men"

"Thank you, aunt, but I have none whatever; and as to marrying Colonel Bockenheim's daughter"

"*His* daughter!" exclaimed the Baroness haughtily; "no, indeed, I never thought of such a connection! We can easily find some one more suitable."

"Yes, yes, we can easily find some one more suitable," repeated Rupert, while he hurried towards the door. "Time enough, time enough. I give you the next ten years to look out for a wife for me. No man should ever marry until he is past thirty."

"Generally speaking, perhaps, you are right; but in your case it is otherwise. You are the last of the Adlerkron Windhorsts; and know, that should you die without having children, estates that have been in our family for hundreds of years fall to the crown. Windhorst you know"

"I know, I know," cried Rupert; "but your other

nephew, Walden, of Waldenburg, is precisely in the same position. Why don't you bestow some care on the preservation of your own immediate family? Conrad must be a well-grown lad by this time. What's his age?"

"Don't name him to me!" she exclaimed angrily. "The son of a brother I disliked so much, and who did not scruple to injure my reputation in every way that lay in his power, shall never inherit anything from me. All my hopes and expectations are centred in you."

"I'm very sorry to hear it," said Rupert, with an impatient sigh, "and wish that I had a brother or any thing that would save me from proposals of marriage, and prevent so many people from interesting themselves in my concerns."

"I hope you have no objection to my expressing some interest about you, Rupert?"

"O, of course not."

"Well then, I wish to speak a few words to you about something really of importance, and deeply interesting to us both."

"I am afraid Glaneck expects me,—if you would only postpone your communication until I return . . ."

"But you intend to spend the whole day with him: I heard you say so!" cried his aunt with visible irritation. "You never bestow five minutes' attention on me, however," she added with affected resignation; "you learned to treat me with indifference and disrespect from your uncle, and I ought never to have submitted to it from either of you."

Rupert had heard this so often that he either no longer doubted the fact, or deemed it unnecessary to attempt a contradiction, and merely replied while his hand was on the lock of the door: "I intended to have remained out late, but if you desire it I shall endeavour to get back in time to talk to you before you go to bed. Early to-morrow morning I must start for the north; the remainder of my leave of absence ought to be spent at Windhorst: they tell me the roof wants repair again; I wish half the castle would fall to the ground—the other half would be more than large enough for me!"

“Rupert!”

“You need not look so shocked; there’s no harm in a man’s wishing his ancestors had been more economical in stone and mortar. I never go to Windhorst without thinking what a famous cavalry barrack it would make!”

“Oh, Rupert! if your uncle were alive, and could hear you talk in this way, after all the improvements he made there during your minority!”

“I did occasionally hint something of the kind to him; for even his presence could not make it other than a magnificently dull place. I am thinking of buying a very pretty hunting-lodge near Exfort as soon as I find we are likely to be quartered there; but I can tell you all about that in the evening. You may expect me at nine or ten o’clock. Are you satisfied? May I go?”

His aunt did not look satisfied, but she nodded her head, and Rupert, uttering a hasty *au revoir*, left the room.





CHAPTER II.

SOOON after her nephew left her, the Baroness, muffling herself in a fur-lined cloak, and accompanied by her housekeeper, descended the stairs to inspect the rooms prepared for the reception of her sister-in-law and her two daughters. Under pretence of a wish to be useful and kind to relatives in not very brilliant circumstances, and altogether forgetting to mention that her wealth had not been able to procure her one friend, or even a companion whose presence she could tolerate, she had offered them the use of some apartments on the ground-floor of her house, after having found it impossible to induce any tenant to remain more than a few months in them. It is probable her sister-in-law would have declined the permission to occupy them, had not the letter containing the proposal hinted something conciliatory about a "certain important paragraph in her husband's will," and a "hope that her house would henceforward be a home for her sister-in-law and her daughters."

Unwilling to decline the first advance towards friendship on the part of their rich relation, they had not ventured to refuse, and they quitted Italy with heavy hearts; and from Meran they wrote to request the Baroness to purchase whatever furniture was absolutely necessary in the first instance, but to avoid any expense beyond their means. Nothing could be more comfortless than the appearance of the large low rooms with their half-dozen chairs, hard cushionless sofas, and scanty white curtains.

The Baroness Adlerkron, however, seemed to think it quite good enough for the expected occupants, and even found some of the bedroom furniture unnecessarily costly.

“Painted chests of drawers and wardrobes would have answered the purpose quite as well, Monica,” she observed to the housekeeper, who stood shivering beside her, “painted in imitation of cherry-wood or walnut, you know. This is an unnecessary expense—don’t forget to collect all the bills, that my sister-in-law may see exactly the price of everything.”

The woman sneered slightly, and murmured something about stoves requiring to be heated, as there had been no fires since the whitewashing.

“The time of their arrival is too uncertain,” replied the Baroness coldly; “but you had better bespeak wood for them—not, however, from the peasant who supplies me; I wish as much as possible to avoid employing the same tradespeople.” She drew her cloak tighter round her, and walked up stairs.

After looking over her house-accounts, and scolding a good deal about the extravagance practised, without exception, by every member of her establishment, she summoned her maid and changed her dress. The morning wrapper was thrown aside, and a silk dress, evincing an economical inclination to follow the latest fashion without a too great expenditure of stuff, was substituted; an indescribable fantastic head-dress, supposed to be Hungarian, composed of bright-coloured velvet ribbons, partly concealed her dark hair, which was but slightly tinged with grey; and while she amused herself clasping bracelets on her wrists, her maid kneeling before her, placed on her feet a pair of diminutive silk shoes the colour of her robe. With satisfaction she glanced at both feet and hands, and then a little less confidently at her full length image in the glass. It was the reflection of a woman past her prime, but not yet faded: the marked and regular features were still so handsome, that, as she gazed, a smile of proud approbation stole over them—a row of teeth of faultless purity became visible, and she turned away, calling her

dogs around her, as she held out her hand impatiently for her handkerchief.

The maid, in presenting it, said diffidently, "Martin wishes to know if the sledge will be"

"Martin may wait for my orders," said the Baroness, haughtily interrupting her.

"His daughter was so very ill last night, that"

"I know nothing of his daughter—I have never heard of his having a wife," said the Baroness, frowning; and then, shaking her handkerchief in the air, which was a signal for her dogs to make violent springs to catch it, she walked on to the drawing-room, followed by all four, barking and snarling around her.

There she found waiting for her a young man who was known by the name of the Adlerkron *aid-de-camp*. He had brought a letter of introduction to her—had been invited to her house, and some way or other had got a habit of going there every day. Nor had he been singular either in this name or in his habits; each following regiment had furnished a successor, sometimes older, sometimes uglier, never younger, until the time our tale commences: but if we follow the Baroness into her drawing-room now, it will puzzle us to find out what can induce so very young a man as Count Ivan Polyak to spend every hour, not claimed by actual duties, in that large cold room. Perhaps he wished to have a lounge in one of the first houses in the town—perhaps he was an admirer of the still handsome Baroness—perhaps he liked people to talk about him: these reasons, and some others of a less creditable description, were commonly assigned him by the Salzburg world, which proves that the world there can be as unnecessarily censorious as elsewhere. The fact was, he had only just joined his regiment—had been educated at home in the heart of Hungary. Half proud, half shy, and not particularly clever, he had not learned to feel at ease among his comrades excepting when he was on horseback; while with the Baroness he could talk of his father, mother, brothers, sisters, and tutor, without reserve: besides she was a correct and unwearied accompanier on the piano-

forte, and he sang a little and played the flute in a melancholy gentlemanlike sort of way. Though not an amusing, the Baroness was a loquacious woman—was accustomed to have some one to listen to and answer her appropriately; and during both her married and widowed life she had always had a tame man of some kind or other about her, so that such a person had become at last absolutely indispensable. The French have their *cavalier servant*—the Italians their *cicisbéo*—the Germans their *hausfreund*. The English vocabulary (on this occasion one may rejoice in the poverty of the language) fails to furnish a word, so we must be satisfied with the Salzburg military denomination, and say that *the* aid-de-camp was a small slight young man, with coal-black hair and eyes, a sallow complexion, turned-up nose, and slightly projecting chin; his tightly-fitting hussar uniform was worn with such ease, that it seemed what it nearly was, rather a national costume than a military dress.

He sprang across the room to meet her as she entered, and then commenced some noisy play with the dogs until she had established herself on the sofa, and drawn an elaborately inlaid spindle-legged work-table towards her, from the silk pouch of which she drew forth a huge piece of tapestry. Then he sat down beside her, and while the dogs endeavoured to tempt him to continue their boisterous sport by scratching and whining at his boots or springing on his knee, he unceremoniously pushed them down with one hand, while, leaning forward, he with the other endeavoured to construct various incongruous edifices by heaping together the different implements of female industry, bonbonnières, vinaigrettes, flacons, and all the other miscellanies usually collected on such tables.

“I scarcely expected to see you to-day,” she said, taking a pair of scissors out of his hand. “How did you happen not to join the sledging party into Bavaria?”

“I feared they would make me drink too much of that sour Rhine wine, which I cannot learn to like; so I refused to go with them. I suppose it is bad taste on my part; but I think our wines better.”

“Tokay against johannesberg,” said the Baroness.

“Exactly. By the bye, I regret to say that you must wait until spring for the tokay I promised you: we have no roads passable at present, so the wine must come with my horses—I am sorry for the delay.”

“It is of no consequence. But what do you intend to do with more horses? you told me yesterday you intended to sell your greys.”

“Very true; but—you see—I often want money, and am continually obliged to apply to my father: to do him justice he has been liberal enough—but I am a bad manager, and he has now informed me that he can send me no more—but a . . . as many horses and as much brandy as I choose.”

“Brandy!”

“Yes; we have distilleries on our estates—most people in our neighbourhood have.”

“I suppose,” said the Baroness, “as the Bavarians have breweries?”

“Very likely; I don’t know anything about Bavaria as yet, excepting that the beer is good.”

“Well—but—about the brandy?”

“Brandy he offered me, and corn too, but they were not in my line, so I chose the horses.”

“And how many do you expect?”

“I don’t know; a good lot, at all events, for we have everything on a grand scale at home.”

“I wonder your father does not sell his corn and brandy.”

“We are so quite out of the way of roads and markets, our brandy is sold to the people about us, and the produce forms the greater part of our income. As to the rest, we have everything we want for the plentiful keeping of a house, with servants and horses unnumbered.”

“But when you went to Pesth . . .”

“Oh my mother and sisters always quartered themselves on our relations; my father never moved, he was bored enough by their coming back with all sorts of new dresses and ideas.”

“New ideas! of what kind?”

“Why, the last was, that we must invite all the officers quartered within ten or twelve miles of us to our house, and from that time they never were out of it: my eldest sister married one of them, an Austrian, and we thought it a famous thing at first.”

“And not at last?”

“Why, not exactly. When I visited her in Vienna, on my way here, she was living in a queer out of the way lodging, and could only afford to keep one pair of the horses my father had given her; then, she and her husband went to every one’s house who asked them, and never gave anything at all themselves. I thought the concern shabby, and told Ilka my opinion plainly enough.”

“I daresay she told you hers in return.”

“She said I was a foolish boy, and did not know how people lived in civilized countries!”

“A most slighting speech,” said the Baroness, smiling; “unpardonable, if it had not been made by a relation and countrywoman.”

“Oh in her heart she is as much a Magyar as I am; nevertheless, we had a desperate battle, in which I should have been victorious if her husband had not come to her assistance. It is only lately, however, that I have begun to find out what he meant by people in civilized countries living on money, and not on the raw produce of the land. When at home, I had everything I wanted, and never knew how it was procured—now, I am obliged to pay for every glass of wine I drink.”

“You don’t find your present state of independence so agreeable as you expected, perhaps?”

“Not quite; and, if living on money be, as my brother-in-law says, a stride towards civilisation, I wonder what he would call living, as I do now, on nothing at all?”

“That is the excess of civilisation,” said the Baroness, laughing, “and can only take place for any length of time in highly civilized cities!”

“Indeed! But even in highly civilized cities, if one happen to have a brute of a banker. . . .”

“Hush,” cried the Baroness, playfully; “I have a great

respect for bankers—all reputable people have; there are few better trades, and in time of war or rumours of war, like the present. . . .”

“Oh, if there were a war, I should have very little to do with the bankers—I could forage for myself then.”

“Of course you would; but while we are waiting for the commencement of hostilities, suppose we drive out in a sledge?”

It was ordered, and her maid appeared with muffling in every possible form, and a bonnet with long waving feathers. Now the sledge, with its costly furs, silver bells, tassels, and plumed horses, was by many degrees the handsomest in Salzburg: the occupants, therefore, were more pleased than surprised to perceive that people stopped to look at or after them as they dashed along the streets and over the bridge. They saw not the nods, the shrugs, the scornful smiles, or vulgar winks that pursued them; with undisguised satisfaction and unerring hand Polyak guided the impatient snorting horses and fragile vehicle over the frozen snow, more pleased, however, than his companion, when they were overtaken on the *Walser Felder* by the military sledging party to Bavaria. It seemed as if all the officers of the garrison had turned out, and each as he passed saluted with grave mien and laughing eyes, Rupert not excepted, even while he called out “Ten o’clock at latest!”

On their return, as Polyak was about to take leave, the Baroness asked him to share her dinner. Without a moment’s hesitation he accepted the invitation; and it was very evident that he felt himself quite at home when soon after seated opposite her, at a little table, in a little room, with a very little dinner before him.





CHAPTER III.



AS the hour appointed by Rupert drew near, the Baroness became fidgety, cross, and hungry, and the moment the clock struck ten she rang the bell violently and ordered supper. She had time to eat it, and might have sat quietly ruminating afterwards, as is so strongly recommended by physicians in general, had not restlessness instead of quietude been her habit, which, as it proceeded from the neglected cultivation of an active mind, and total want of real occupation of any description, was a torment to every one about or depending on her. The servants, even those who had stolen off to bed, were now put in requisition. One was sent with a note to Count Polyak to ask if the sledging party had not yet returned; others were to make inquiries of the sentinels at the two entrances of the town from the Bavarian side; others again to watch at open windows, to give notice of the sound of approaching sledges; while she herself walked up and down the room, not suffering uneasiness, but yielding unreservedly to impatience and ill-temper.

It was in this ruffled state that she now awaited her nephew's return, and it was perhaps a fortunate circumstance that, when he arrived, his companions detained him long to say adieu, and make promises of beating up his quarters during the ensuing summer. At length they were gone, and Rupert bounded up the stairs, and presented himself to his aunt a perfect personification of good humour.

"Capital fellows the officers here!" he exclaimed: "Never met a jollier set!"

"*You* look as if you had been more than jolly," observed his aunt.

"Then my looks belie me," he answered, slightly shrugging his shoulders, and then stooping to play with the dogs, determined not to commence a conversation which he would rather have avoided.

"Have you supped?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, thank you: hours ago."

"And a . . . you had a gay party . . . and Count Glaneck enjoyed it as much as any of you?"

Rupert stared; he knew his aunt did not care the least in the world for his friend, so he answered laughingly, that "Glaneck had been very cheerful, and he was sure would be extremely flattered if he heard of her kind inquiries about him."

"Hum. . . . It seems he has quite got over the loss of his wife!"

"Oh, no; he speaks of her constantly; and, from what he says, is not likely to find any one to supply her place."

"And yet he must marry again, I suppose," said the Baroness; "widowers generally do when they have children."

"Perhaps he may," said Rupert. "If I had known that you were curious on the subject, I should have asked him."

"Pshaw," cried his aunt impatiently; "he is a man I rather dislike than otherwise; but he has been an exemplary husband, they say, and may have recommended you to a . . . Perhaps, however, it is better to speak plainly, and say at once what I mean."

"I wish you would," said Rupert; and perceiving that evasion was no longer possible, he added, "I have returned home early on purpose to hear all you have to say to me before I leave."

"Must you then go to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"And your aunt and cousins hourly expected!"

“I regret extremely not being able to renew my acquaintance with them, but I can no longer postpone my journey; and I should think that a few months sooner or later can be of very little importance to any of us.”

“I think differently, however. Do you remember your cousins?”

“Scarcely. I have not seen them for more than twelve years—not since the time we were at Aix, you know, when Melanie married Count Falkenstein.”

“Yes; I remember we had to give them money to go there, as some one foolishly told your uncle Carl the baths might be of use to him. Physicians should never order baths for people who have not money to pay for them!”

“But they were of use to him,” said Rupert. “He was quite cheerful and well afterwards.”

“At all events he got Melanie off his hands before she had time to make a fool of herself,” said his aunt; “but, to return to your cousins Fernanda and Cyrilla, you have not told me what impression they made on you.”

“None whatever,” replied Rupert laughing; “they were mere children, and did nothing but learn lessons and practise the pianoforte from morning till night. They must be dreadfully accomplished by this time, I should think! Melanie, however, made quite as deep an impression on me as you seem to desire. She certainly was, when she married Falkenstein, the most beautiful woman I ever saw. She is still very handsome, and still the most romantic, poetical. . . .”

“She is an authoress,” cried his aunt, interrupting him—“an authoress; and I hate women who write books. I have no fancy for figuring in print, and therefore will have nothing to do with her. She has never taken the least notice of me since her marriage; but I don’t want her, nor does she want me in any way, it seems, and so we are equal. Your other two cousins are, however, differently situated. I am afraid they will not be satisfied with the permission to occupy part of my house; they, or at least their mother, will expect me to do something for them. . . .”

“But surely,” said Rupert with a look of surprise, “surely you must have had some intentions of that kind when you proposed their coming here?”

“You seem to forget, Rupert, that you will be a loser in exact proportion to my generosity.”

“There is no generosity in the case. Give them at once what my uncle bequeathed them.”

“I shall do no such thing; they have got enough from me already—besides, he left it to them only in case they should marry with my consent!”

“Oh, there will be no difficulty on that score here, if you do not object to the military line. Let’s see: there’s Glaneck for one. . . . Ah, now I know why you inquired so particularly about him—Glaneck for one, and Polyak for the other! Pol is a capital little fellow—domestic habits, and all that sort of thing!” and Rupert laughed merrily, undisturbed by his aunt’s frowning countenance.

“You talk as if I were a common matchmaker,” she observed angrily.

“Most women,” he said, still laughing, “have, I believe, an inclination to provide for the domestic happiness of their unmarried friends; and I have little doubt that you have already formed plans for both your nieces. Now, my advice to you is, that you refrain from using your authority on so very important an occasion: tell them that their uncle’s legacy is theirs when they choose to claim it, and that you leave them at liberty to marry when and whom they please.”

“You talk lightly of a large sum of money, Rupert; however, this is the very subject on which I wished to speak to you.”

“You surely did not think that I would attempt to dissuade you from such laudable intentions?” asked Rupert smiling.

“Wait until you hear my whole plan. You know your uncle’s and my greatest wish has ever been that in the course of time you should repurchase Adlerkron, the place from which we take our name, and that your grandfather so foolishly sold in order to buy shares in those odious copper mines . . .”

“Which,” said Rupert, “have turned out very well, and are a vast deal more profitable than Adlerkron.”

“He would have sold Windhorst too if he had had the power,” cried the Baroness indignantly.

“’Twas a pity he could not, as he then would have retained Adlerkron,” said Rupert. “I am sorry that place has gone out of the family.”

“Now you are talking rationally.—So you would like to have Adlerkron again?”

“Of course I should; but Polinsky asks a fancy price for it now.”

“And you have been negotiating with him about it?”

“Yes; but finding it quite beyond my means, I intend to employ my minority capital in another purchase.”

“No, no, Rupert; Adlerkron is not beyond your means if you will only do as I propose. I must endeavour to keep my fortune undivided for you, and at the same time do something for these girls. I cannot, therefore, think of a better plan than that you should marry one of them: Fernanda is too near your own age, but Cyrilla is scarcely eighteen, and when I saw her promised to be very pretty.”

Rupert had expected a proposal of marriage, and had already mentally refused all his female acquaintance; his cousins had never once occurred to him, and, though determined to decline the alliance, he was for a moment unprepared to answer, and his aunt continued with evident satisfaction: “You see, Rupert, the connexion is in every way desirable—your aunt too is such a—a—very worthy person, and has taken such enormous pains with the education of her daughters, that they must be everything a reasonable man could desire in a wife. I should have preferred letting things take a natural course, and had you consented to await their arrival, it is very probable that you would have thought of this plan yourself; but to be quite candid with you, I have another and stronger motive than I have yet ventured to tell you for urging this match.”

Rupert looked up but did not speak, and she continued—

“Your determination to return to the north to-morrow has confirmed all my fears that you may at last be in-

veigled into a marriage with that half French girl—that artful Virginie de Lindesmar, who they say actually attempted to poison herself in a fit of desperation about you.”

Rupert sprang from his seat, exclaiming angrily, “This is intolerable! How can you believe or repeat such nonsense, Madam?”

“Whatever you may say, Rupert, some foundation for this report there certainly was: her mother, who it was said at first joined and assisted her, grew frightened, and hushed up the affair as well as she could; but Virginie de Lindesmar most certainly attempted to poison herself one night after a ball, and it was supposed you intended to marry her from compassion, though every one agreed in saying that you had not committed yourself in any way. I have my correspondents, you see, and know more about you than you imagined.”

“Any thing else, Madam?” asked Rupert with affected composure.

“Oh yes. One person who wrote to me on the subject added, that Virginie had confessed that she”

“I beg your pardon for interrupting you, but when I assure you that I never thought of marrying her or or any one else, in all my life”

“They say, however,” persisted his aunt, “they say that a sort of conditional engagement exists between you.”

“Then,” answered Rupert, impatiently, “reports contradict each other in this instance, for *they say*, also, that she is about to be, or is actually, married to a Frenchman—a Vicomte de Rubigny, and she is, in all probability, by this time in Italy with him, as he is attached to some embassy there. On that subject at least let us avoid a dispute.”

“I never knew any one so fond of mystery, or so tenacious of secrets as you are, Rupert. Any other would have told me the true state of *the* case at once, when they knew they might rely on my discretion.”

“I really have nothing to tell. You know how very intimate I have always been with the Lindesmars. I played with Virginie when she was a child, and danced

and sang with her when she became older. What could be more natural? If people choose to give us in marriage to each other, I cannot help it. Surely you have lived long enough in the world to know that reports of that kind are often almost without foundation."

"Then the stories about her jealousy, and the laudanum, and her mother's intrigues, are not true, and she never went to your rooms disguised as a student . . . or . . ."

"Heaven and earth!" cried Rupert, losing all patience, "this is too much! I have told you that she is married, or going to be married, and as she will never in any way be connected with our family, she cannot in the least interest you in future. If you have not anything of more consequence to discuss, I shall propose going to bed, as I start very early in the morning."

"Why, you have not given me any answer to my proposal about your cousin."

"My cousin? Cyrilla, I think it was you said? I . . . a . . . consider the relationship too near."

"Nonsense, Rupert! The Adlerkrons and Waldens are cousins, and have gone on intermarrying for three successive generations!"

"I won't marry my cousin," said Rupert, folding his arms as he leaned against the stove with a look of great resolution; "I have no doubt that she is very pretty, and very accomplished, and all that a reasonable man could desire, as you so justly observed; but I am not sufficiently reasonable to take a wife on recommendation, and must and will choose for myself."

"Your wife will have no enviable lot!" cried his aunt, angrily; "for a more obstinate, passionate, disagreeable man does not exist than you have become during the last few years!"

"If such be your opinion of me," said Rupert, with some irritation, "I cannot conceive how you could think of sacrificing your niece so barbarously."

"My niece must marry whoever I please, and I shall not think it at all necessary to consult her inclinations on the subject; it will be very odd if I cannot control her at

least. You consider yourself independent of me, and brave my authority without the slightest consideration; but there are limits even to *my* indulgence . . . Do not try me too far, Rupert . . . my affection for you is great, but it has bounds; and once for all I tell you, that if you do not consent to marry Cyrilla—I—I—will—never forgive you—never speak to you again—and all connection between us will end this night!”

“As you please, madam.”

“So you will not marry her?” asked his aunt, in a voice trembling with anger.

“No—no—certainly not.”

“Then,” she cried, rising from her chair, and vehemently pushing aside everything with which she came in contact, “then, this must be our last interview. When your whole conduct is a system of opposition to my wishes, you cannot expect that I should still consider you as my son, or look upon you as my heir! To-morrow I shall make another will, and I feel myself exonerated from the necessity of even naming you in it.”

“I might remind you of my uncle’s intentions and wishes,” cried Rupert, his eyes flashing and his face flushed; “and I might try to make you aware of the unreasonableness of your command, but—I am only too glad to escape my present thralldom on any terms; and pray keep in mind that you have yourself pronounced me free—discarded me. Gratitude for my uncle’s kindness and care, not mercenary motives, has bound me to you hitherto. I beg in future that you will altogether forget my existence.”

He strode out of the room as he pronounced the last word, leaving his aunt in a state of mixed astonishment and rage. No longer controlled by his presence, she paced the room with unequal steps, murmuring unintelligible words of dire import. At the end of a quarter of an hour she became calmer, seated herself again, and, while she impatiently tapped the arms of her chair, began to think that she might perhaps have gone too far. Her threat (for it was nothing more) of disinheritance had been received in a manner that had completely confounded her; she regretted having been

so premature with the disclosure of her plan, and saw plainly how injudiciously she had acted in losing her temper when she ought to have been most temperate. The sound of horses entering the gateway made her start; she felt convinced that, late as it was, Rupert was about to leave her house—perhaps for ever. She rushed into the adjoining room, and rang without intermission the bell which denoted a summons for her maid, until she appeared.

“What noise is that on the stair?” she asked quickly.

“They are carrying down the carriage cases. I have already told them not to make so much noise,” she replied, quietly placing a chair before the toilet-table, and a pair of slippers beside it.

“How absurd to leave at such an hour! Go directly to Baron Adlerkron, and tell him I wish to speak to him again—there was something which I forgot to say to him. Tell him . . . no . . . go at once,” she cried, waving her hand impatiently.

“Perhaps,” she murmured, pressing her hands together, “perhaps he will refuse to come to me; and, for a girl about whom I am perfectly indifferent, I may have lost the only one of our family left me to care for, and whose position in the world could add dignity to mine! I ought to have made allowance for his warmth of temper, and after all I could not expect him to take a wife without having seen her!”

She listened anxiously as steps approached, and presently Rupert entered her room enveloped in furs, and evidently on the eve of departure.

After a struggle for composure, she began reproachfully, “I wonder, Rupert, you are not ashamed to give way to such violence of temper. You ought to endeavour to overcome these bursts of passion. . . .”

“I thought it was you who had been angry,” he answered, with a good-humoured smile.

“Is it not anger that makes you set out on your journey at such an hour of the night?” she asked quickly.

“I like travelling at night; and besides, I feel that I have nothing more to do here, now that I am to be disinherited.”

“Pooh, nonsense! I only said that when I was angry—I mean displeased—I never for a moment seriously thought of such a thing.”

“I do not know what you thought, but I heard what you said, and to prevent a renewal of the subject, I disclaim all expectations of any kind—the purport of your will I shall never inquire. Freedom of action is worth more than all you could bestow on me. I should act as I do now even if I were poor; how much more easily can I do so when your fortune, large as it is, is no object to me whatever.”

“No object whatever! . . .”

“None; for, much as I am habituated to wealth, there never was any one whose personal wants were so few, or whose tastes so simple as mine. I am independent in every sense of the word.”

“And, to prove your independence, you will some day marry a woman without either fortune or connexion!”

“I have determined at all events not to marry Cyrilla: I feel a sort of incipient dislike to her, which will probably ripen into a respectable kind of hatred.”

“Rupert, you would provoke a saint: it is impossible to know whether you are jesting or in earnest.”

“Believe me, aunt, I have no inclination to jest about matrimony; every approach to the subject seems doomed to be a source of annoyance to me. I sometimes feel as if I were predestined to be unfortunate in my choice, or in my wife, though, to avoid it, I have resolved not to marry until I am desperately in love with some one in every way desirable.”

“Oh, Rupert, nothing can be so desirable as what I have proposed; I cannot understand a *man* making objections, when everything can be arranged satisfactorily.”

“Cannot you?” said Rupert, half laughing; “perhaps we are more inclined to make objections than women.”

“But you have not so much at stake . . .”

“Haven’t we?” he said, looking impatiently towards the door.

"Well, well, I shall say no more about it; but before you go, you must promise to forget what I said to you just now."

"Do you mean about Cyrilla?"

"No, I mean about my will: if, however, you would remain until to-morrow"

"If I did, you know we should spend the time in useless arguments."

"Say at once, Rupert, that you do not intend to marry."

"I shall say no such thing. Cyrilla is perhaps the only person against whom I feel a decided antipathy."

"Obstinate boy!"

"Boy!" repeated Rupert, laughing; "well be it so, but let me then hear no more about wives and marriage."

"And . . . when may I expect to see you again?"

"Some time next summer . . . per—haps."

"And in the meantime," said his aunt, "should I find Cyrilla . . . I mean, in case I should wish to see you for a few days, will you not come to me?"

"Oh, of course, if it be possible; but understand me, I will *not* marry Cyrilla."

"May I at least depend on your consulting me before you decide on any one else?"

"I cannot promise that," said Rupert; "to consult is half to ask advice, which one should not do without some intention of following it; but you shall hear time enough for us to quarrel about it a few weeks, at the end of which time"

"You will do exactly what you please," cried his aunt, interrupting him; "I see you are incorrigible."

Rupert laughed, took leave, and hurried down the stairs into the cold night air with a light heart, and a determination that many months should elapse before he again would enter the house he was then leaving.





CHAPTER IV.



THE next day brought the travellers, who had been so anxiously expected. Had they arrived twenty-four hours sooner their reception would have perhaps been different; but the Baroness Adlerkron now felt more annoyance than interest as she stood at a window and saw, with a mixture of irritation and scorn, the heavily packed hired carriage, in which her relatives had made their journey, roll slowly under the archway into the house. She had been watching with Polyak the snow-storm that had prevented them from sledging, and served as an excuse for him to remain to dinner. As he now turned away and began hastily to drink off his coffee, naturally supposing it necessary to leave her, she observed carelessly, "You need not hurry; they will scarcely come up stairs for the next half-hour or more, and I don't feel the least inclination to go to them."

In the meantime, however, her servants ran unbidden down the stairs. Some assisted to unpack the carriage, while others opened the rooms and commenced lighting the fires.

"Pray, mamma, don't take off your cloak or you will be frozen," cried Fernanda, springing towards her mother, and endeavouring to warm her hands by rubbing them in her own, which were equally cold and stiff.

They looked round the room and shivered.

"How gloomy! How wretched and inhospitable these rooms appear to me!" exclaimed Cyrilla with dismay.

“ Oh, what a change is this ! These are vaults, not apartments ! ”

“ Wait until they are warm and we have had time to make ourselves at home in them before you pass judgment,” said her mother, glancing significantly towards her sister-in-law’s servants. “ You are much too hasty in forming your opinion of places and persons.”

“ I don’t think I shall ever feel at home here, or ever be warm again,” she rejoined heedlessly, while she took off her bonnet, and pushed back a profusion of long fair ringlets, showing a bright joyous face in all the indefinite beauty of extreme youth ; then suddenly observing that her mother looked very grave, she half-playfully, half-seriously knelt down on a footstool beside her, and taking one of her hands in both hers, silently watched the bringing in and partial unpacking of some military-looking cases, on which time had nearly obliterated the letters and numbers that had for years ensured them a place on the baggage waggons of a very distinguished regiment. There was a quiet indifference to trifling discomforts in the manner of all three,—an absence of whatever was not absolutely necessary in the contents of these chests, they proved more plainly than words that the owners had travelled long and far. And in fact this had been the case in no common degree ; for the Baroness Carl Adlerkron had never been induced to part with her daughters, either to send them to a school or to relations whose lives were more tranquil than her own. They had, therefore, with her followed their father during his lifetime, and afterwards a constant pursuit of health had made the south of France and Italy the scene of perpetual wanderings. Of the seclusion supposed to be necessary for the purpose of education they knew nothing ; even as children both sisters had mixed in society,—it had become habit, second nature to them ; and yet Cyrilla, with her unembarrassed manners and gradually acquired knowledge of social life, was as little worldly, and quite as innocent, as any blushing girl who has just returned to her family after having passed eight or ten years of her life in a *Pensionnat* or “ Establishment,” with well jalousied win-

dows, and high-walled grass garden, learning to speak French and work embroidery.

When their aunt's servants were gone, Fernanda began to assist the elderly grave-looking Swiss maid to unpack, while Cyrilla first walked and then danced round the room. "The furniture here," she said merrily, "will not damp our voices when we sing, or impede our movements when we dance."

"I must say," observed Fernanda laughing, "our aunt has followed somewhat too implicitly the directions to avoid expense: we must have another sofa directly, that mamma may be able to enjoy her afternoon sleep. I hope the stove is beginning to get warm."

Cyrilla went towards it,—not a particle of heat had as yet penetrated the antiquated mass of tiles which filled one entire corner of the room, reaching to the very ceiling. "No one would imagine," she said, placing her hands on the different parts where the warmth was most likely to penetrate,—“No one, I am sure, would imagine that that civil housemaid of my aunt's shoved half a tree into its gaping mouth!”

"I think," said Fernanda, "these rooms must have been intended for a porter who was to be allowed an unlimited quantity of wood; we shall be obliged to spend half our income buying fuel."

"My dear girls," said their mother, "you seem to forget that we have the apartments free of rent. Instead of abusing the stove, let us give it time to warm the room, while we go to your aunt, who seems to expect us to seek our welcome."

They followed her as she ascended the stairs in silence, Fernanda endeavouring, as well as she could, to arrange her dress and smooth her ruffled hair. She was painfully conscious of the plainness of her appearance,—knew that her hair would not fall of itself into picturesque waves and curls like Cyrilla's—knew that her features were irregular, and that freckles disfigured the reddish fairness of her complexion,—and never forgot that her figure, diminutive and thin, was particularly unattractive. The early knowledge

which she had acquired of these imperfections had ably seconded her mother's efforts to make them forgotten by diversified acquirements. Without decided talent, or even strong inclination for any of the arts, perseverance had made her a good musician, a correct painter, and a perfect dancer.

Count Ivan Polyak was leaving the Baroness' apartments as they entered them; he moved aside to let them pass, and, while they scarcely observed him, he stood and deliberately examined the three persons concerning whom he had lately heard so much, and with whose ages, habits, hopes, fears, and expectations he was perfectly acquainted. They became conscious of their gradual approach to the drawing-room by the barking of dogs,—were formally announced like ordinary visitors, though in a voice inaudible from the noise in the room,—and some minutes elapsed before they were able to hear the few words of welcome murmured by the Baroness. Cold was the kiss and scrutinizing the glance bestowed on each niece; and Fernanda's lips closed rigidly, and Cyrilla's eyes filled with tears, when they saw their mother vainly struggling to conceal her annoyance at a reception so different from what she had expected.

“ You have been long on your journey—Down, Jolie—Minkerl, Minkerl . . . how can you be so tiresome!—I . . . a . . . expected you several days ago!”

“ The weather was inclement, and I was ill.”

“ Dreadful misfortune being so unhealthy. I'm sure I hope Salzburg may agree with you. Nothing I dread so much as being near any one who is constantly ill—it is so very depressing, and one can't do any good, you know!”

“ You speak like all those who do not know what illness is,” answered her sister-in-law, with some bitterness; “ from me at least you shall *hear* nothing of it, and my children are healthy in an unusual degree.”

The Baroness fixed her eyes on Cyrilla, and observed,—“ She is a complete Adlerkron; they have all light hair with natural curl and blue eyes: her eyes are darker than Rupert's—how old is she?”

“Seventeen.”

“And Fernanda?”

“Twenty-three.”

“How thankful you ought to be that the other two are in heaven! What would you have done with four daughters now?”

“I can never do otherwise than regret having lost my children,” replied her sister-in-law firmly. “Had it pleased God to leave them with me, he would have provided for them also. I have always observed that large families get on well in the world.”

“Humph! And what do you mean to do with these two?”

“I hope, with your assistance, to see them in time happily married.”

“That is, you have brought them here on speculation, and have taught them to think rationally about men and marriage? You have done well.”

“I hope I have been able to preserve a due medium,” said her sister-in-law with a slight degree of irony in her manner. “I think I can answer for my daughters not being unreasonable in their expectations.”

“So much the better; it would be absurd if they claimed the privilege of choice. You will allow that if any one ever had a right to choose—I was that person; and yet I married the man proposed by my father; and had Gottfried been old instead of young, ugly instead of handsome, I should still have married him. Love had nothing to do with the matter at all!”

“I remember hearing something to that purport,” said her sister-in-law; “but my daughters are still in ignorance of circumstances that occurred before they were born, and in no way concern them.”

“O,” said the Baroness, “I thought you might have told them the true state of the case when speaking of me. I do not see why they should not know that their uncle Gottfried chose me because he wanted capital for speculations,—perhaps also because I was the handsomest woman of his acquaintance, and that I married him to . . . to . . . please my father.”

“And,” said her sister-in-law smiling, “and to punish some one else with whom you had quarrelled.”

The Baroness ceased playing with her dogs. She even pushed Minkerl rudely away, as she answered, “Precisely ; I did not choose the world to suppose me forsaken. The Waldens are too proud to endure pity !”

“I believe,” said her sister-in-law smiling, “I believe you have been much more envied than pitied. Your life has been a series of fortunate events ; every speculation of your husband’s succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations ; you have enjoyed health and wealth, and have been celebrated for your beauty. What can a woman desire more in this world ?”

“Children to inherit my wealth—children of whom I could be proud when I grow old !”

“Ah, I had forgotten that—and children are such a source of interest all one’s life, and such a comfort in one’s old age—especially daughters.”

“I don’t care for daughters,” rejoined the Baroness ; “I should have liked to have had a son. You know, of course,” she added, “that, according to the wishes of Gottfried. I have adopted our nephew Rupert ?”

Her sister-in-law bowed ; a long pause ensued, which was broken by the latter asking in a somewhat constrained voice, “How Rupert had grown up—it was so many years since she had seen him.”

“He is everything I could desire — gay, handsome, fashionable—a little obstinate sometimes ; but no one is faultless. By the bye, I have something of importance, about which I wish to speak to you the first time we are alone—this evening, perhaps, when the young people have gone to bed. . . .”

But on this hint the young people, glad of the offered chance of escape, precipitately rose from their chairs, and, notwithstanding their aunt’s invitation to remain to supper, and assurances that they had quite misunderstood her, they both left the room.

The conversation between the two who remained was, as may be supposed, about the marriage of Rupert and

Cyrilla. The Baroness acknowledged the indiscretion of which she had been guilty, in having spoken to the former before he had seen his cousin; and, although she did not seem to consider the inclinations of the latter of the slightest importance, she agreed with her sister-in-law in thinking that Cyrilla should be kept in ignorance of the plan until Rupert had seen and approved of her. She then spoke in terms of sincere admiration of her appearance—doubted not that both girls had been admirably educated; and, in short, by commending her children, made her sister-in-law forget the coldness of her reception, and the unaccountable pettishness which had been so evident at the beginning of their interview. The ready acquiescence to all her plans put her into good humour; and, utterly insensible to the wearied looks of the poor invalid traveller, she detained her discussing the same topics until near midnight; nor even then would she have allowed her to go, had not her sister-in-law declared that she must at least ascertain that Fernanda had gone to bed. “Fernanda never allows any one to undress me but herself, as it is then we talk over all our little house-affairs—she is an excellent housekeeper.”

“It is a pity that she is a . . . rather . . . plain,” said the Baroness; “but if she be amiable, accomplished, and economical, why . . . one would not at all mind keeping her at home—every one cannot marry in this world, you know! Wait a moment, and I can give you a skeleton-key to your apartments, which will enable you to enter without ringing the bell. Good night.”

The Baroness Carl took the key, and slowly descending the stairs entered her apartments unheard by her eldest daughter, whom she found, as she had expected, in the drawing-room; but the poor girl had fallen fast asleep sitting perfectly upright in her chair, a small lamp burning dimly on the table beside her, and her hand grasping the key with which she had intended to have admitted her mother.

“I believe I have been asleep,” she cried, starting up. “Had you to wait long? who opened the door for you?”

"Your aunt has given me a key; and in future, when she detains me so long, you must promise to go to bed."

"What on earth could have induced you to remain all this time with that disagreeable woman?" asked Fernanda, while she assisted her mother to undress.

A pause ensued. Her mother hesitated whether or not she should confide to her daughter the whole of her sister-in-law's plan; but the habit which she had acquired during the last few years of consulting Fernanda on all occasions prevailed, and she related without the slightest reserve all that had been said, adding, that the idea of such a connection was more familiar to her than her sister-in-law seemed to think, it had so often been proposed by their uncle Gottfried when they were mere children, as a good way of providing for Cyrilla and securing an eligible wife for Rupert.

"If you could only ascertain what kind of man he has become!" observed Fernanda, thoughtfully. "I can only remember when he visited us at Aix that he was a tall fair-haired boy, with most outrageously high spirits."

"It would be a most desirable match," said her mother, musingly, "in every way desirable—fortune, family, age, exactly what we could wish! Your aunt," she added, looking up with a smile, "seemed purposely to avoid even the most distant allusion to your uncle Gottfried's will, but of course it has influenced her on the present occasion—Rupert would never think of demanding Cyrilla's little fortune!"

"Do you think it possible," asked Fernanda, "that the five thousand Friedrichs d'or can have induced her to form this plan?"

"Most assuredly, most undoubtedly; and you must look out for some one who will at least agree to wait until her death; she will never otherwise give her consent to your marriage. It is a most fortunate circumstance that she has chosen Rupert for Cyrilla; and she is in earnest too, for she was very angry with him for refusing to remain here and not agreeing to marry her at once. I don't in the least blame him; I think he was quite right!"

“And now,” cried Fernanda, “imagine his surprise when he sees her—think how he must love her when he knows her!”

The conversation continued long in the same strain, ending by an agreement that it would be advisable not only to keep Cyrilla in total ignorance of their hopes and expectations, but even to avoid, if it were possible, ever mentioning Rupert's name when she was present.





CHAPTER V.

THE Adlerkrons, or as our first acquaintance, the Baroness, chose to have them called, the *Carl* Adlerkrons, had been but a short time established in Salzburg when they received a letter from the Countess Falkenstein, proposing an immediate visit, and saying that she longed to see her stepmother and sisters again after so many years' separation. If the former had no objection she would take Cyrilla away with her; she knew that Fernanda was indispensable to her mother's comfort, or she would propose carrying off both, &c., &c., &c.

"How very kind of Melanie to write so soon, and to propose coming for me herself at this time of year," said Cyrilla. "You will allow me to go, of course?"

"Yes—I think so—most probably,—but I must first visit your aunt and hear what she says."

"My aunt!" repeated Cyrilla, with a look of surprise: "She can have no objection; and if she have any inclination to direct or control us, I hope you will not permit it—your consent is sufficient for me."

Her mother and sister exchanged looks; and then the former said quietly, "I think it better to ask her opinion nevertheless. Will you go with me?"

"No, thank you. I cannot endure those odious dogs; and besides, I believe I—I rather dislike my aunt than otherwise."

"You must not dislike her; she really means well, and is interested about you."

“Perhaps so; but it is impossible to force affection, and my feelings towards her nearly resemble antipathy. Ask Fernanda if she thinks my aunt a loveable person.”

Fernanda shook her head, and bent over her work.

“May I write an answer to Melanie?”

“Not until I return,” replied her mother, with a little decided nod of her head, which Cyrilla understood so well that even when the door closed between them she refrained from the expression of annoyance that rose to her lips, and silently continued her occupation of sketching imaginary likenesses of her sister Melanie, while awaiting the termination of the conference. It lasted longer than any of them had expected, for her mother met with opposition as violent as it was unexpected. The Baroness would not hear of Cyrilla’s leaving Salzburg,—how could her sister-in-law think of anything so absurd? Or how could any reasonable person imagine that an introduction to the society of a provincial town like Exfort could in any way promote their plans for her marriage? The case would be different if Rupert and his regiment were quartered there; but of that there was no chance for the next year or two. In the meantime the less Cyrilla was seen or known the better: she had already perceived that even in Salzburg people were beginning to pay her more attention than was desirable.

Prudence predominated, and the Baroness Carl yielded; but she softened the announcement to Cyrilla by saying that she thought it very probable her aunt would change her mind in the course of a few months, and that it would only be necessary to request Melanie to postpone her visit, and delay her journey for a short time.

That same day the Baroness wrote a letter to Rupert, beginning with entreaties, and ending with commands that he would forthwith return to Salzburg—his aunt Sophy was ready to receive him as a son, and Cyrilla was everything that the most fastidious of men could desire.

Rupert did not keep her long in suspense; his answer came by return of post.

“He was very glad to hear that his cousin was so charm-

ing—he liked having pretty cousins. On the subject of marriage his ideas were unchanged; no one should ever force a wife upon him. With respect to returning to Salzburg, that was at present impossible; he could not ask for leave of absence for some time, and when he did it would be to go to Exfort, where he hoped to be in the month of May, for the purpose of purchasing a place called Freilands from Prince N. Melanie and Falkenstein had written to him about it, saying that it was within a few miles of the town, well stocked with game, and exactly the sort of thing he had been trying to get.”

Now, completely convinced that the only chance of bringing Rupert and Cyrilla together would be to send the latter to Exfort, when Melanie again wrote to say that she would delay her journey to Salzburg until February, and that she would take her sister to Berlin and have her presented at court before they went to Exfort—there was no further difficulty made, the Baroness however observing, “That she hoped Melanie was steady enough to take charge of such a girl as Cyrilla!”

“Cyrilla is steadier than you imagine.”

“She is, however, very young,” continued the Baroness, “and so pretty that she will have opportunities enough of making a fool of herself.”

“I must say, I do not apprehend any danger whatever.”

“But I do. Melanie is too full of sentiment and poetry to observe what is going on about her. I heard lately that she believes in ghosts and animal magnetism, and all sorts of nonsense.”

“That will not, however, make her house a dangerous place for Cyrilla. During the years we have been separated I have constantly heard of her from friends and relations of my own with whom she is intimate. When she first married I was uneasy about her, I confess, but the accounts have been satisfactory in every respect, and she has merely retained a few odd romantic notions that only find vent in words; besides, Count Falkenstein is such a steady rational domestic man that I could not desire a better protector for Cyrilla than he will be.”

“Perhaps so, if he would give himself the trouble to be one but he lives in his office and his study, and pores from morning till night over parchments and protocols, as if he were prime minister instead of president of a provincial government.”

“I have been told that he has a great deal of business to transact,” said the Baroness Carl as she rose to take leave; “but he oversees and rules his own house as completely as he presides over the district confided to his charge.”

“Then you mean to write to him about Rupert perhaps?”

“Certainly not; but if you think we ought to explain to Melanie or hint to Cyrilla”

“Better say nothing,” cried the Baroness quickly. “I would give much that I had never mentioned Cyrilla’s name to Rupert! Most probably what I have said will prevent him from ever looking at her.”

The Baroness Carl smiled incredulously.

“Oh, you don’t know what a spirit of opposition he has! However, there is no use in talking about it any more; let us hope the best, and don’t forget that I expect you all to coffee to-morrow. We must talk about the Carnival, and consider whether or not it be advisable for Cyrilla to go into society here or not.”

The question was decided to Cyrilla’s satisfaction; she was to be allowed to enjoy herself at that age when enjoyment is unalloyed by recollections of the past or care for the future.

And the Carnival commenced. The Carnival! that word which, to untravelled English ears, conveys merely some vague ideas of masquerades and nummeries, but to the inhabitants of catholic Europe pleasures innumerable, the more valued because the time is restricted from Twelfth Night to Shrove Tuesday. How often is the question asked, “Shall we have a short or long Carnival?” How often are the new almanacs consulted; and when the weeks are few, how quickly the balls follow each other; how much pleasure (perhaps we should say amusement) is compressed into the limited space. Every rank of society has its balls, from the court down to the very lowest grade

of servants. Dancing is in Germany a passion which pervades all classes alike—in other respects they have but little in common, and seldom mix. Commerce has not often enabled Germans to amass enormous riches; and even were individuals of the burgher class to become possessed of extraordinary wealth, it would not raise them above their original sphere, so strong is the line of demarcation drawn by birth and fortified by prejudice.

In England . . . but no; we will not say what wealth can do there. Cleverer pens have already described the rich *parvenu's* progress—his almost certain elevation, though devoid of all that commands respect save wealth alone. We must, however, also remember that in England talent and intellectual eminence of every description will enable the possessor to rise, perhaps even more quickly, and certainly more agreeably, in the social scale, whereas both are alike powerless in Germany. Birth and genealogy decide the position in life so completely that it is a physical impossibility to change it, inasmuch as none can give themselves other fathers and forefathers than those from whom they have their origin; while the multiplicity of the class denominated noble, enabling them generally to marry among themselves, this spirit of *caste* is kept up with a rigour little inferior to that of India. The low caste (not noble) are very frequently admirers or worshippers of the high caste (nobles); many wish also to belong to them—some, irritated by the insuperable barrier opposed to their ambition, hate and ridicule the whole aristocracy; while others, more reasonable, are satisfied with their citizen state, and regard the nobles as a class apart, who have peculiar ideas, habits, and whims of their own, to which they have an hereditary right not worth disputing. A “noble” in Germany, no matter how impoverished he may be, or how low his station in life, never loses the thought, “I am a nobleman;” and this idea enables him to look down on the richest and most prosperous burgher with a sort of proud contentedness that would be perfectly incomprehensible to an Englishman.

The prerogatives of the nobility have lately been much and justly curtailed; some are however still retained, and

among them one which is not considered such in England—the right of being presented at and frequenting the court. This privilege, possessed with few exceptions exclusively by them, is pretty generally claimed, though valued by many more as an outward and visible sign of nobility than as a means of exhibiting their loyalty; but as in all communities it is the endeavour of a few to raise themselves above the level of those with whom they associate, and one observes this propensity strongly developed, as phrenologists would say, wherever women take the lead, so, even in the social intercourse of the privileged class, there are well known divisions and distinctions, the most common and comprehensive being that called the *Haute Volée*. Mrs. Trollope, in her amusing work, “Vienna and the Austrians,” speaks of *la crème* and *crème de la crème* as further distinctions used at Vienna. That many other metropolises aspire to the same extreme nicety in the classification of their “first society” is beyond a doubt, and if they fail, it is not from want of good will but want of numbers. The effect has been, and is being made, in smaller and very small cities, though where a few fortunate individuals fancy themselves *crème*, their numerical force is not sufficient to substantiate their claims, or enable them to be quite exclusive. In order to fill their rooms, they are under the necessity of inviting to their balls and soirées those who are modestly contented with the name of *Haute Volée*, and who are for the same reason obliged to mix unreservedly with the court-going nobility.

That in Salzburg there was a *Haute Volée* was a matter of course—the more tyrannical as there was no court with equalizing condescension to moderate its arrogance. The Baroness Adlerkron was one of its members, though not the most revered among them; but even those who spoke slightly of her conduct past and present, and who unreservedly ridiculed her ill-lighted ball-room and economical suppers, did not dare to oppose her sway. She was, and had been all her life, what is called fashionable, nor was she likely to lose that enviable title to consideration, having both wealth and connection to secure her claims. As soon

as she discovered that her nieces were even more accomplished than she had expected, their acquirements were on all occasions put in requisition, without the slightest consideration for their inclinations. The very unwillingness which they occasionally manifested to leave their mother acting as a sort of stimulant to her selfish feelings, she not only insisted on having them constantly with her, but also accompanying her wherever she went. On the evenings that she now was "at home," her house began to be crowded; there alone tableaux were got up, and masks and sledging parties arranged. Count Polyak was no longer the only frequent visitor, though he continued to appear day by day with a punctuality which first surprised and then amused both sisters. Their presence never in the least interfered with his habits: he came at the same hour, sat in the same place, talked in the same monotonous tone of the same not particularly interesting events; and though his attentions became by degrees a little divided, the so very much larger portion was still devoted to the Baroness, that she was quite satisfied; indeed, the idea of finding rivals in her nieces had never once entered her head, so certain did she still feel of the power of her station and beauty.

The limited weeks of the Carnival passed gaily over, and the sound of sledging bells and mazurka music was still ringing in Cyrilla's ears, when another letter from her step-sister arrived to name the day of her arrival. "How quickly the time has passed since we came here!" she said, after having carefully read the long, well-written pages; "I never thought I should have liked Salzburg so much; and Count Polyak says it is even pleasanter in summer!"

"But," said her mother, "in summer there are no balls or masked sledging parties!"

"Of course not; but waterfall, lake, and alp parties must be still gayer. I should not at all have minded if Melanie had written to say she could not come for me until autumn!"

"Indeed!"

"The north of Germany," she continued, "is not to be compared to the south; even my aunt allows that the climate here is pleasanter, the country much more beautiful; but at all events, people are of more consequence to me than places. Here I have you and Fernanda, and dozens of gay acquaintances, and there, nobody I care about, excepting Melanie and my cousin Rupert. I confess I rather wish to see *him*."

Her mother and sister were silent, and she added, "Neither of you appear to remember how very near a relation he is—a sort of brother in fact, as we have no other. Count Polyak says I am exceedingly like him."

"What else does Count Polyak say, my dear?" asked her mother, smiling; "he seems to have become your oracle lately."

"He is the only person who can, or will, tell me anything about Rupert," said Cyrilla, laughing.

"And what has he told you?" asked Fernanda, quickly.

"I thought you felt no sort of curiosity or interest concerning him," said Cyrilla, archly; "at least you said something to that effect a short time ago, when I spoke to you about him."

"Perhaps she did not like to exert her imagination so unnecessarily," observed her mother; "so uselessly, I may say, for neither of you can possibly have the least idea what he now is."

"I have a tolerably good idea, nevertheless," said Cyrilla, pertinaciously. "In appearance he is a perfect Adlerkron, tall, fair, and, from what Count Polyak says of him in other respects, I wish with all my heart he were really my brother! He was immensely popular here, and more than one of our acquaintances had serious intentions of marrying him!"

"Marrying him!" repeated her sister. "Was Mademoiselle de Bockenheim one of them?"

"Yes. How did you know that?"

"I knew she had been in the habit of coming here with her father, and I asked her something about Rupert one evening. . . ."

“So you have been making inquiries too!” cried Cyrilla, laughing; “but I don’t think you have heard as much as I have.”

“I have not heard of his intending to marry *Maiselle de Bockenheim*,” said *Fernanda*, smiling.

“Nor I either,” rejoined *Cyrilla*; “and *Count Polyak* says it is more than probable he will never marry—certainly not until he is quite old. He has got that unfortunate mania with which men of large fortune are so often afflicted, of fancying that no woman really cares for him, but that any one would marry him, in order to be joint possessor of *Windhorst*, *Lanneck*, *Felsheim*, and all his other possessions.”

“And yet,” said *Fernanda*, “I have heard that he is a man one could like for himself alone.”

“O yes; *Count Polyak* says he liked him very much; every one liked him; and as, after all, his matrimonial fancies do not in any way concern us, I have determined not to let them interfere with the affection which one ought to feel for so near a relation. Don’t you think I am right, *mamma*?”

“Quite right. And now, go and let *Justine* try on your new dresses; she says you run away from her just as you used to do when you were a child!”





CHAPTER VI.

THE day on which the Countess Falkenstein was to arrive was spent in anxious expectation. The sisters had not met for twelve years, and a good deal of curiosity was mixed with a sort of affectionate solicitude. While their mother, according to a custom acquired during years of constant ill health, lay on a sofa and slept, Fernanda and Cyrilla kept up a whispered conversation, which, from the force of habit, promoted instead of disturbing her slumbers. Long and earnestly they spoke, for it was probably the last time they would be alone together for many months, and as they had never yet been separated even for a day, these months assumed the importance of years, and reiterated were Fernanda's entreaties that her sister would write often, and without reserve.

Cyrilla was too happy herself to observe the effort which it cost her companion to speak composedly of their separation; but she listened attentively to her proffered advice, and made many promises, which, in the sequel, she found it impossible to fulfil.

"Melanie does not seem to be very exact as to hours," she observed, at the end of a silence which had lasted some minutes. "She wrote that she would arrive about two o'clock, and it will soon be four, and so dark in these rooms that I cannot see to work any more. I wonder how she will like my aunt's having invited a large party to stare at her!"

"Not at all, I should think," answered Fernanda. "I

am sure she would prefer spending the evening alone with us ; and if she arrive late, which seems probable now, it will be very disagreeable to her changing her dress to meet a number of people she does not care to see. But, talking of dress," she continued, rising quickly, "reminds me that I have not given Justine any directions about mamma's."

"What's the matter !" cried their mother, starting up ; "has Melanie arrived ?"

"No, mamma. I am sorry I have disturbed you."

"I have slept long enough, too long I believe," she said, smothering a yawn. "Your aunt requested I would go to her early ; so I think, if you will ring for Justine, I may as well dress and go at once."

"I suppose you will allow me to remain here, and receive Melanie," said Cyrilla.

"Yes ; but tell her that your aunt expects to see her."

Cyrilla returned to her place at the window. It was in a sort of alcove, formed by the thickness of the walls, and raised a few steps above the level of the rest of the room. The height of the windows from the floor gave a sombre prison-like appearance to the apartment, but had the great advantage of securing the inhabitants from being seen by passengers in the street, while the elevation gave them a more extended view, both up and down it. As the evening closed in, and heavy drops of rain began to platch into the half-melted snow, Cyrilla retreated to the stove, and sitting down beside it, seemed to think profoundly—and, in fact, thoughts came crowding fast upon her, chasing each other like the phantasma of a dream ; but if one might judge, by the half-smiling tranquil expression of her delicate child-like face as it rested in the palm of her hand, the thoughts were of a cheerful, almost pleasant description. Let us not attempt to scrutinize them ; they were those of any girl of her age when on the eve of a journey to an unknown land and to unknown people : she would inevitably fall in the estimation of the grave reader were even an attempt to be made to follow the wild excursions of her imagination, as her cousin Rupert, of whom she knew little, and

the town of Exfort, of which she knew nothing, passed before her mind's eye,—the President's house—shoals of new acquaintances, and scores of officers, who all danced inimitably! A dim, distant vision of something or somebody peculiarly interesting and attractive followed; and then the long-expected sound of carriage-wheels, and a large heavy travelling carriage, with the usual noise and commotion, rolled under the archway.

"My dear Melanie," cried Cyrilla, eagerly, "we have been expecting you for hours! the day has appeared endless to me! We thought from your letter that you would arrive at two o'clock."

"So I should—or even earlier, had I been travelling with the President; but when I am alone I never hurry myself: if you are punctual you will win his heart directly. Let me look at you," she added, drawing her towards the window, "you have grown taller, of course, but your face seems just the same, as well as I can judge in this dark room."

"Justine, bring the lamp," said Cyrilla, and a . . . something to eat. I dare say you are hungry," she added, turning to Melanie, who was throwing aside her shawl.

"Not at all. I dined at Reichenhall, where we last changed horses, and one of the causes of my delay was going to see the salt springs there: I had to descend under ground, and they made me put on a coat and a broad-brimmed hat, and gave me a light in my hand. I make it a point to see everything of that kind now, as I am at present writing a description of my rambles in my native land."

"Are you, indeed!" said Cyrilla, "you must let me read it before it is printed—what is the name to be?"

"I think I shall call it, 'Wild Flowers plucked by the Way, to form a Wreath of Prose and Poesy!' You have no idea of the importance of an attractive name for works of this kind. But now tell me—where is Fernanda—and where is . . ."

"They are at my aunt's, where a large party have assembled expressly to see you. It is very annoying; for, as you only remain one night here, we would rather have had you all to ourselves."

“It would have been pleasanter, as I don't want to see your Salzburg people,” she answered, taking her sister's arm, and walking into the adjoining room. “Tell me, love,” she continued, looking round her with a calm scrutinizing gaze, “tell me, is your—a—our mother satisfied to live in these apartments?”

“O yes; she says we ought to be glad to have them. Had you but seen them when we first came here, you would have had reason to be surprised, but since they have been properly furnished, they do well enough. We never see any one here, as we are obliged to spend almost our whole time with my aunt, who scarcely allows Fernanda a few hours a-day to practise either her singing or any thing else, as she is accustomed to do.”

“Practise! must she still practise?”

“Fernanda does, regularly.”

“And is then your mother—just—what—she used to be?” asked Melanie, with some hesitation.

“I don't quite understand you,” said Cyrilla, looking towards her inquiringly.

“I mean . . . does she come into your room in the morning with her watch in her hand, saying, ‘Time gone past—never can be recalled.’ Are you obliged to get up as early as formerly and learn all day?”

“O no,” cried Cyrilla laughing, “I wish mamma were strong enough to do so, now! It was latterly Fernanda who took her place, and used to talk of the proper employment of time, and the necessity of acquiring knowledge.”

“Good heavens!” cried Melanie, with a look of alarm, “you don't mean to say that Fernanda, *my* sister Fernanda, has become a pedagogue in petticoats!”

“A what?” asked Cyrilla.

“No matter—is Fernanda like her mother?”

“Yes, very.”

“In mind or person?”

“Both.”

“Well, thank goodness you are not—you are the image of my handsome—my glorious father!” She bent forward and kissed her, as the French say, with *effusion*.

“Did you . . . do you . . . not like mamma?” asked Cyrilla, hesitatingly.

“Don’t look so shocked, love—I daresay I shall like her now extremely—In fact I did like her formerly as much as my fear of her would permit.”

“How could any one be afraid of mamma?” exclaimed Cyrilla.

“Not good children like you and Fernanda; but has she never told you what a wild spoiled creature she found me when she married? How unmanageable I was—how I was sent to school, and returned home in the holidays not having learned anything?”

“No. She told me you had a great talent for drawing and painting, which you neglected most unpardonably.”

This was a fact of which Melanie did not like the recollection. It had been the remark of one of her schoolfellows in a moment of envious feeling, “That Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron inherited her genius for drawing from her maternal grandfather, who had been a painter!” From that day Melanie had thrown aside her crayons, and no threats or entreaties had ever been able to induce her to cultivate the talent that so eminently predominated in her nature as to be inextinguishable. The ideas denied one form of expression sought another: the fertile imagination found vent in rhymes and in the composition of picturesque dresses, which were shown to advantage by the placing of her tall graceful figure in the most fascinating but sometimes too evidently studied attitudes.

“I never draw,” she said after a pause; “but the little knowledge I have of colours is very useful in choosing dresses. I hope you know how to dress yourself well, Cyrilla? I assure you it is quite as necessary as any other accomplishment for a woman.”

“I have had but little experience,” answered Cyrilla. “We have always been so poor that economy has been our first object.”

“How very distressing! In fact, our aunt upstairs is your only hope, I suppose?”

"Exactly—and rather a forlorn one too. But I am sure she is expecting you all this time!"

"Let her expect me a little longer then—she is not likely to leave *me* a legacy."

"As to that," said Cyrilla, "we are unpleasantly enough in her power; for if she refuse her consent to either Fernanda's or my marriage, no matter how eligible it may be, we must wait until her death to inherit my uncle's legacy, and her life is nearly as good as ours. Rupert is her heir. She informed us that she had adopted him, before we had been an hour in her house. I think she did so to prevent our expectations from being too great."

"One might almost think that wealth attracted wealth," said Melanie, "rich people inherit so much more than poor. My aunt would do better were she to bestow some of her large fortune on you and Fernanda instead of Rupert, who does not want, and will not thank her for it."

"We shall see him in Berlin, shall we not?" asked Cyrilla.

"Of course, and as we shall be there a week or ten days, he can hardly avoid seeing you."

"Hardly avoid seeing me!" repeated Cyrilla.

"There is no use in concealing from you, Cyrilla, that he showed such unpardonable indifference—in fact looked so bored when I spoke to him of you, that I resolved he should not hear that you were to accompany me home. I don't think he even observed my silence about you the last time I saw him—he talked of nothing but Virginie de Lindesmar's marriage to the Vicomte de Rubigny. Now, well as he knows the Lindesmars, they ought not to interest him more than his own cousins-german!"

"I suppose," said Cyrilla, thoughtfully, "he does not like poor relations."

"O no, I must not do him injustice," cried Melanie, warmly; "that is not at all like him—he is both good-natured and generous, and it is impossible not to forgive his carelessness when one sees that he does not mean anything unkind. However, he will be at Exfort the beginning of May, and then you will see enough of him to judge for yourself. What noise is that? Who is coming?"

“Mamma and Fernanda most probably,” answered Cyrilla, opening the door; and she then watched with some curiosity the meeting between her mother and step-sister. Nothing could be more cordial. It seemed as if the thin bent form and careworn features of her mother had dispelled the awe of Melanie on the one side; while the affectionate manner and dignified grace of her still beautiful stepdaughter had, on the other, nearly removed the misgiving which reminiscences of twelve years before had inspired.

“Is Melanie at all altered, mamma?” asked Cyrilla, as she observed the almost anxious scrutiny with which her mother observed her.

“No—yes—that is, her face is the same—her figure has grown much fuller.”

“O don’t say so,” exclaimed Melanie, “the idea makes me miserable. I should like to be just as Cyrilla is—slight, yet not thin.”

“Cyrilla must have quite grown out of your recollection,” observed Fernanda.

“Very nearly, and you too—let me look at you.” Fernanda bore the inspection with a good-humoured smile.

“I could be afraid of you, Fernanda—you look too sensible, and,” she added with a sigh, “I fear *trop peu sensible* for me!”

“And yet,” said Fernanda, archly, “I like poetry, and know *one* little volume of poems quite by heart!”

“Is it possible!” cried Melanie, blushing with pleasure; “and I did not dare to send any of my works to you!”

“Pray send them to us in future,” said her stepmother; “your poems are very pretty and ladylike.”

“I did not know,” said Melanie, “whether or not you allowed my sisters to read fiction of any kind. You formerly disapproved of it, I know.”

“Because,” said her mother, smiling; “you were at that time so fond of such works, that you would not read anything else.”

“I don’t know what mamma may have been formerly,” said Cyrilla, laughing; “but she can now, with all her

wisdom, become as absorbed as any one in a new novel!"

"I am glad to hear it," said Melanie; "for my recollections made me suppose that she condemned all works of imagination. I may now perhaps venture to say, that those who do so are deprived not only of one of the greatest intellectual enjoyments, but of two-thirds of the literature of every known language."

"Do you hear, mamma?" said Cyrilla.

"Yes, and I agree with Melanie; but there are some years of one's life that ought not to be devoted to mere 'enjoyment,' even if it be, as she correctly observes, 'intellectual.' I should not, my dear child, have limited your reading of such works, had I not a few years ago discovered a tendency to romantic sentimentality in your disposition, which might have caused you much imaginary and some real unhappiness in the course of your life: but," she added, glancing towards Melanie, "but I am happy to say all that seems now quite eradicated."

Melanie bent forward eagerly, as if about to speak, but suddenly drawing in her breath, remained silent. Perhaps her stepmother observed the movement, for she continued, as if some opposition had been made to her last remark, "Yes, I am happy to say so, for nothing can be more wretched than a girl who is poor, and therefore in some degree compelled to marry, having her head full of romantic ideas that never can be realized: either she refuses establishments which might content any rational woman, or, accepting one, her whole existence afterwards is a series of petty annoyances, which, if she have more feeling than intellect, end by completely undermining her domestic happiness."

Melanie, confused and visibly shrinking, made no attempt to interrupt the speaker, who continued, "Nothing is more unfortunate for a woman than to have a too exalted and poetical idea of the passion of love; disappointment must be her portion in such a case, for there is little poetry in real life, and the sooner we learn to be satisfied with plain homely reality the better. I shall consign

Cyrilla to your care to-morrow, my dear Melanie, the healthiest and happiest of human beings: watch over these inestimable blessings, and bring her back to me as”

“You are filling my mind with doubts and fears,” exclaimed Melanie, anxiously interrupting her. “How can I be sure that the climate of the north of Germany will suit her constitution as well as that of Italy? She is no longer a child—may find somebody at Exfort on whom she may bestow her affections”

“In either of these cases, your responsibility ceases,” said the Baroness Carl, with a satisfied smile. “I have not the least objection to her finding ‘somebody’ at Exfort worthy of her affection, as, with the exception of Fernanda, I know no one more likely to be happy herself, and promote the happiness of another, as Cyrilla.” While speaking, the idea of Rupert filled her mind as completely as if he alone existed, as if there were not other “bodies” in the world possessing quite as much attraction for her daughter as her refractory anti-matrimonially disposed nephew.

“I think,” said Fernanda, “we ought now to go to my aunt.”





CHAPTER VII.



THE effect produced by Melanie's "graceful presence" on her aunt's guests is not worth recording; still less worthy of notice would be the journey northward with Cyrilla, in a comfortable unadventurous travelling carriage, during the short days of a not particularly cheerful winter. They reached Berlin a day later than they had intended, as Melanie never left any place at the time appointed; but the President was still at the hotel, and apparently so immersed in business, that they had more than a week still at their disposal. It was spent in visiting Melanie's friends and acquaintances, introducing Cyrilla to them, drives in the environs when the weather permitted, and presentations to the different members of the royal family.

The day on which Cyrilla was to be presented to the Crown Princess arrived; the hour appointed was late, but Melanie retired to her dressing-room soon after four o'clock. She was at that age when art and attention can still almost quite supply the charm of youth, and therefore considered her toilet an affair of great importance. "Besides," she observed half apologetically to her sister, who laughed at the idea of so much time being so employed, "besides, my dear, we have been out the whole afternoon, and my nose being more susceptible of cold than yours, if I were hurried in dressing I should infallibly have a flushed face all the evening. You can amuse yourself trying the new music you chose to-day."

“But do you not think it may disturb the President?” asked Cyrilla; “he is in the next room writing.”

“O no; he says *your* music never disturbs him, he quite delights in hearing you sing.”

Cyrilla turned to the pianoforte, and began to look over a quantity of music that lay upon it, occasionally singing, but more frequently playing the different parts intended for the voice, until a thick snow-shower, beginning to hurry on the close of evening, made her efforts to distinguish the notes fruitless. She rose, watched for a few seconds the hurrying pedestrians in the street, and then, walking to the other end of the room, took possession of that side of a comfortable *causeuse* which enabled her to turn away from the cheerless prospect that the windows offered.

While still indulging in a few sage thoughts on the shortness of winter days, the gloominess of falling snow, and the bore of presentations at court, which gave people the trouble of dressing—going out—waiting—and all for from ten to fifteen minutes’ conversation (if such it may be called) with some royal personage, who had previously to be informed of one’s name and condition, in order to be able to ask the few uninteresting questions usual on such occasions, she heard the sound of quick approaching steps, and a moment after a tall officer entered the room, saying to the servant, who had in vain endeavoured to announce him,—“Tell the Countess I have been at Potsdam the last ten days, and beg of her not in the least to hurry her toilet.” He evidently did not at first perceive Cyrilla; for, throwing his gloves on the table, he unbuckled his sabre and walked to the window—then, lightly humming a tune, turned back and strode towards the stove, where he suddenly became aware of the presence of a half-reclining figure enveloped in a large shawl, with a black velvet bonnet and long veil that concealed the face nearly as much as the gathering darkness made it indistinct.

“Pardon” he said with a careless bow. “I was not aware that any one was in the room—I am waiting to see the Countess Falkenstein.” He then seated himself, and pushing aside some pamphlets and cards which lay on the

table, took up a small book bound in red morocco leather, and closed with a gold pencil case, which Cyrilla knew contained her sister's manuscript poems. Seeing him deliberately open it, she extended her hand hastily, saying, "Excuse me, I must beg to have that book, it is . . . it is not an Album."

"I know very well what it is," he answered, smiling; and for the first time looking at her with a sort of half-awakened curiosity. "If I were not the most inattentive of listeners, I should by this time have known all Melanie's poems by heart."

Placing the book on the table, he drew his chair closer to the *cauceuse*, and attempted to catch a furtive glimpse of her face without being rude; but Cyrilla now purposely turned her head away. She knew, from the words "Melanie's Poems," that her cousin Rupert was beside her; and, although not offended at the indifference which he had so evidently manifested about her, a slight feeling of mortification, which she found it impossible to repress, made her resolve not to be the first to claim relationship.

"Then you have read the contents of this little book?" he continued.

"Yes."

"Are an intimate friend of my cousin Melanie's, perhaps?"

"Yes."

A pause ensued, and the silence in the room was broken by an ill fastened window-blind of painted canvas descending spontaneously—at first slowly, but ending with a jerk, covering one of the windows, and excluding so much of the little remaining light that they could merely distinguish each other's figures. Cyrilla's first inclination was to leave the room, her next to indulge in a gay laugh. She yielded to the latter without restraint, and before it had ceased, her cousin suddenly started up, exclaiming, "Can you forgive me for not recognizing you? The darkness—the impossibility of seeing your features—the—the—surprise at so unexpected a meeting . . . Have you been long here? When did you return from Italy?"

“Some months ago.”

“Indeed! I thought you had only just arrived. Have you been staying at Exfort?”

“No, but I am going there now.”

“Your mother told me . . .”

“My mother!” repeated Cyrilla in astonishment.

“Perhaps I am mistaken, it may have been your sister . . .”

“You must be doubly mistaken, for my sister determined not to tell you anything about me. You seemed to feel so little interest when she spoke of me . . .”

“You surely would not wish me to let *her* know the deep interest I must always feel in everything that concerns you!”

“And why not? It is surely very natural.”

“Oh, un—doubtedly . . . but . . . she is, we must hope, unacquainted with a . . . You know what I mean.”

“Indeed I do not in the least.”

“Well, but you may easily suppose that I could not speak to her as I would to your mother, so I—pretended an indifference I was far from feeling.”

“You pretended indifference! The feint was little creditable to you, Rupert!”

“Excuse me. I think otherwise; it was for your sake, not mine, and I expected praise instead of blame.”

“I . . . don’t comprehend . . . We don’t understand each other at all, it seems. . . . You are not in the least what I expected you to be!” said Cyrilla, leaning back with a gesture of annoyance.

“Provoking creature!” exclaimed Rupert starting from his chair, and beginning to walk up and down the room. Cyrilla, to whom his words and conduct every moment became more inexplicable, rose also and moved towards the door. “Stay, stay,” he cried eagerly, placing himself before her. “Do not let us part in anger—rather let me take advantage of this opportunity to explain anything which may have offended you in my letter. It was your mother who insisted on my writing. She dictated every word—would not let me change a single hard expression—said that nothing else would ever induce you to give up the idea of . . . Pshaw . . . you must understand me now!”

“Less than ever,” said Cyrilla, quietly. “I never received any letter from you, and could almost imagine you were talking to some one else, if your words did not remind me of both my mother’s and sister’s avoidance of your name,—their determination never to speak to you. What you have done to offend them, I know not; for my own part, I hoped to have renewed the unrestrained intercourse of”

“Hah!” exclaimed Rupert, retiring quickly a few steps from her.

“Don’t be alarmed,” said Cyrilla, with a slight degree of irony in her voice; “I was merely going to observe that with me at least you might be intimate and unreserved, without the horrors of matrimony in perspective.”

“True—very true,” said Rupert thoughtfully. “If you really can forgive my not returning your . . . I mean a . . . if, in short, you will be satisfied with friendship, why . . . let us be friends, though—fate has decreed that we should never be more nearly connected.”

“Your manner is odd, almost ungracious,” said Cyrilla; “but I suppose I must take you as you are, and try to forget my disappointment at finding you exactly the contrary of all I had hoped. I accept, then, the unfriendly offer of friendship you have made me, and assure you,” she added, half laughing, “that I have no designs whatever either on your heart or fortune.” She held out her hand as she spoke.

He seized it with a sort of vehemence, exclaiming, “Oh, Virginie, Virginie, I don’t know yet whether you are a—devil or an angel, but,” he added in a whisper, “don’t lead me into temptation any more, for”

“Are you mad?” cried Cyrilla, forcibly withdrawing her hand from his. “What paltry affectation is this—pretending to forget my very name!”

“No, I don’t forget it,” said Rupert, “neither what it was, nor will I forget what it is, if I can help it.”

“There is—there must be some strange confusion here,” said Cyrilla slowly; “Rupert, *do* you know who I am?”

“I should think so,” he answered with a short laugh.

“ Then why do you call me Virginie ? ”

“ I beg your pardon,” he said, bowing ironically, “ I should perhaps have said Madame la Vicomtesse, and have hoped that *M. le Vicomte se portait bien ?* ”

“ Ah,” cried Cyrilla, “ now I perceive that you have taken me for some other person, and I am glad of it, very glad that all your odd speeches were intended for a Virginie somebody and not for your cousin Cyrilla Adlerkron.”

Fortunately for Rupert, who stood petrified with amazement, the door at this moment opened and Melanie entered.

“ Why, Cyrilla, is it possible that you are still here ? ” she exclaimed, “ the carriage will be at the door in ten minutes, and you will not be dressed. Rupert, I am glad to see you,—that is, I cannot see you at all ; but I am happy that you have found your way here at last. I thought I should have been obliged to introduce you to Cyrilla, but it seems you have become acquainted without my assistance.”

“ Yes,” said Cyrilla, “ we have commenced our acquaintance oddly enough, and the impression made on me has not been altogether satisfactory.”

“ The infernal darkness of the room, the extraordinary resemblance of both voice and laugh,” muttered Rupert.

“ After all it was but a mistake,” said Cyrilla gaily ; “ let us forget it and be friends, though, as you so heroically observed, *fate has decreed that we should never be more nearly connected.* ”

“ You cannot easily be more nearly connected than you are,” said Melanie, who had been too much occupied ordering lamps to have heard more than the last words ; “ the relationship is so near, that I have no doubt Rupert will presume upon it, and pay you all sorts of attention,—that is, when he has nothing else to do, or does not happen to be particularly engaged with half-a-dozen others. He does not think it necessary,” she added pointedly, “ under any other circumstances to be attentive to his *cousins.* ”

“ Judge of me for yourself, Cyrilla,” said Rupert, “ and do not let this unlucky beginning prejudice you against me,—the more so, as I can never explain or excuse myself in any way to you.”

"Pray, Cyrilla, go and dress," cried Melanie, a little impatiently; "we dare not be late on such an occasion,—you can talk nonsense with Rupert some other time."

"Wait a moment and let me look at you," said Rupert, eagerly.

"No; but *you* may wait until I return if you choose," she answered carelessly.

He stood with his arms folded, looking after her as she walked quickly down the passage, along which candles and lamps were being carried in all directions, when, obliged to move aside to admit the bearers of lights into the room, he turned to Melanie and observed: "You might have let me know that Cyrilla was here."

"You did not choose to listen to me when I spoke of her to you before I went to Salzburg," she replied with affected indifference, as she turned to the light and began to arrange her bracelets.

Rupert bit his lip, and then asked abruptly, "Is she handsome?"

"No, not exactly."

"Merely good-looking, perhaps?"

Melanie twirled her bracelets as she answered, "She is not as handsome as I am—was, I ought to say."

"Oh," said Rupert, smiling, "that is not necessary. She might be very handsome without bearing a comparison with you!"

"I suppose you mean to say something flattering, Rupert, but you have misunderstood me. Cyrilla is not at all what is called handsome."

"I thought as much," said Rupert; "so after all she is a rosy-cheeked fair-haired girl, such as one sees by dozens all over the world."

"You will not easily find a dozen Cyrillas," said Melanie; "Wilhelm says she only wants a pair of wings to make her an angel."

"The President said so! Then she must, after all, be something very uncommon."

"Only wait until you hear her sing."

"O, I am prepared for all sorts of accomplishments,"

cried Rupert, laughing; "I have heard enough of my aunt Sophy's system of education to expect wonders."

"And yet," said Melanie, "all the instruction in the world, without natural talent, is of little use. Even the short time I was in Salzburg enabled me to discover that the same pains and the same instruction bestowed on different characters and capabilities produce quite different results. Fernanda possesses acquirements—Cyrilla accomplishments."

"A nice distinction," observed Rupert; "but I should have required more than one day to make the discovery."

"And yet it was evident enough," rejoined Melanie, "though among the crowd of people collected at my aunt's, the evening I was there, I doubt if one person among them was aware of the difference,—in fact, the most of the company seemed to think the astonishing rapidity with which Fernanda's fingers flew from one end of the piano-forte to the other much more admirable than Cyrilla's faultless performance of a 'song without words;' and in vocal music, if they gave her the preference, it was because she sang our national melodies, which they understood better than Italian."

"Most probably she has a good natural voice," said Rupert: "our uncle Carl might have been a *primo tenore*."

"Cyrilla's voice scarcely seems to belong to this world," said Melanie enthusiastically; "and the manner in which she accompanies herself is quite indescribable,—so playful, so melancholy, and at times so deeply passionate."

"You are exciting my curiosity," said Rupert; "but I must make allowance for some poetical license in the description."

"No," said Melanie, seriously, "it is but truth; and the more I learn to appreciate her accomplishments, the more I regret the youthful rebellion which deprived me of such advantages in education."

"You have educated yourself after a very pleasant fashion," said Rupert, "and I don't think my aunt would ever have been able to have pedagogued you into being other than you are; but you seem to like her better than

you did when we last spoke of her,—what has caused the change?"

"I fear," said Melanie with a sigh, "I greatly fear she is dying. You never saw such a spectre, and neither Fernanda nor Cyrilla seemed to perceive it, so gradual has most probably been the decay. I had not courage to contradict or even expostulate with her, although her opinions on a very important subject, with regard to Cyrilla, are diametrically opposed to mine."

"*Videlicet*, marriage," said Rupert; "so you have been informed of their plan; but it will be very unlike you if you join them, and, moreover, perfectly useless, I can assure you."

"I know of no plan; but from what my aunt said I see she thinks that Cyrilla's want of fortune ought to induce her to marry from motives of interest; and she has not only inculcated this principle, but in the most systematic manner has repressed every inclination to more exalted sentiments,—has endeavoured to banish every idea that is not absolutely saturated with worldly wisdom from the minds of both her daughters!"

"You don't say so?" cried Rupert with forced seriousness: "actually saturated with worldly wisdom; and you discovered all this in twenty-four hours!"

"My aunt," said Melanie, "seemed to think it her duty to impress on my mind the necessity of Cyrilla's making a judicious marriage,—she talked of nothing else, and I listened to all she said on the subject in silence, but determined, even while she was speaking, that through me a new and ideal world should be opened to my sister. I expected a congenial spirit, and find a light-hearted girl quite disposed to join Wilhelm in laughing at me."

"I think, after all, I may like her," said Rupert.

"Of course you will; every one must like her. I quite idolize her already; and am almost sure that, with much of her father's indomitable gaiety, she has inherited his strong feelings also, and that there is a latent spark of romance in her nature which only requires time and judicious treatment to burst into flame!"

“Allow me,” said Rupert, “to point out to you how much better it would be to leave Cyrilla as she is, free from all sorts of fires or flames. Now, don’t be offended,” he added, as Melanie turned away from him with a gesture of annoyance; “don’t be offended, but listen to my entreaty that you will leave Cyrilla to work out her own scheme of happiness without any interference on your part; and above all things let her be natural, for though you are very charming as an original, a copy, especially if it were a juvenile one, and without your fund of information to draw upon, would be the *ne plus ultra* of absurdity.”

“There is much more danger of Cyrilla’s being unhappy than absurd,” said Melanie. “Fancy such a creature as she is married to a man who cannot or will not participate in the joys and sorrows that chequer this life—who is not capable of understanding what love, pure ideal love is, no, not even by name—who . . .”

“Halt!” cried Rupert, taking up his sabre and beginning to buckle it on with affected haste; “if you have got on the subject of ideal love, we had better end our conversation. But before I go, I really must beg of you either to spare Cyrilla the description of your ideal love, or to tell her honestly that, though you talked in the same way twelve years ago, and sentimentalized with my poor tutor Englmann until his sorrows were little inferior to those of Werther, you actually afterwards in his very presence bestowed your fair hand on his Excellency Count Falkenstein. Let her at least know that one can talk in this way and act in another.”

“Rupert, you are unkind to speak so lightly of my first, my only love—the morning-star of my existence, which, however the glare of day may diminish in lustre, still, believe me, moves along the firmament of my memory, and becomes visible in all the darker moments of my life!”

Rupert coughed slightly and covered his mouth to conceal a smile: he always did so when he either knew or suspected his cousin of adapting the poetical ideas of others to her own use. She understood what he meant, and continued more rationally: “Heaven knows I would have

married Valentine Englmann if we had had enough between us to supply the common necessities of life; but you must remember that I was portionless, and”

“My dear Melanie, do not for a moment suppose that I blame you; you acted wisely in every sense of the word. Englmann would have been miserable, and you still more so.”

“No, Rupert, no. Never were two beings more congenial in mind, never was love based more truly on sentiment and a mysterious combination of spirits.”

“Very Platonic,” said Rupert, making an odd grimace; “but I would rather not hear you talk about that.”

“And why not? Do not the Swedenborgians say that the spirit in another world meeting a congenial spirit can unite itself, and”

“Never mind what they say,” cried Rupert, interrupting her. “It was in this world, twelve years ago, that you wished to unite yourself to a very good-looking and talented young man, but he being poor and ignoble you were not allowed to do so—fortunately for him and for yourself; for what sort of a parson’s wife would you have made after all, Melanie? Only imagine yourself now at Windhorst with half-a-dozen obstreperous children!”

“I should have liked to have had children,” said Melanie, sighing.

“Yes, little counts and countesses, perhaps, with plenty of French bonnes, and nurserymaids to take care of them, but not a pack of turbulent boys who must be washed and dressed with your own hands every morning. Instead of your rose-coloured boudoir, fancy the well-scoured parlour that would be your sitting-room, with no possible escape from these children, who, though very well behaved, all things considered, still, like all such animals, scream, shout, quarrel, ride on sticks, upset the furniture, blow their noses awry”

“You describe so graphically, Rupert,” cried Melanie, laughing, “that one would almost imagine you had experienced all this.”

“So I have; but you know I rather like noise, and am

very fond of children. Whenever I am at Windhorst, the whole Englmann family come to me, and you have no idea how gay they make the old place, or how they enjoy themselves, chasing each other through the large rooms and passages. I have more children than dogs with me when I go out to walk, and am not half as much discomposed as their father when they grow troublesome or tired. You never saw a fellow so put out as Englmann when he has been obliged to carry home a child!"

"A man of such exalted and refined ideas . . ." began Melanie.

"Ah, bah! when a man marries and has six children, he should not mind carrying one of them occasionally; but, with the exception of a little remnant of over-refinement, he is the pleasantest companion possible."

"I heard," said Melanie, "that you had improved his house, and assisted him in various ways."

"I believe the best way to assist him is through his children," said Rupert; "so I have sent his eldest boy to school."

"O, Rupert, how kind of you! How I wish I could do something for him—I mean for them!"

"You can," said Rupert, "and you can oblige me at the same time, if you will find out all about the different girls' schools at Strasburg. Englmann's wife has consented to part with her eldest daughter also; so, next autumn, after you have made the necessary inquiries about religion, and morals, and all the other things, we can send her off too. I was laughed at enough concerning my godson Rupert; but if I were to begin again with Rupertina, as they have barbarously christened her, there would be no end to the joke."

"You may depend on my writing to Madame Joubert to-morrow," said Melanie. "You know she has now the management of the school at which I passed eight years of my life . . . But do you know I should like to follow your example, and do something for these children, if you think it would not be disagreeable to *him* . . . I might adopt one of them—I wonder I never thought of that before!"

Wilhelm would have no objection, I am sure . . . tell me, are any of the younger ones pretty or interesting-looking, like their father?"

"They are all strong healthy children, but I cannot recollect that any of them can justly make pretensions to beauty. Fritz is well enough, but you would think his eyes too small, and his mouth too large."

"Oh, I don't like boys at all—I meant one of the girls."

"There is but one other girl, little Tony; she is not in the least pretty, but the merriest, oddest little thing you ever saw. The best plan would be for you to go with me to Windhorst for a day or two, and judge for yourself. You have not seen Englmann for twelve years; a meeting might be very conducive to your happiness."

"No, Rupert, it would be a renewal of grief."

"I am quite convinced, Melanie, that seeing him as he now is, the hard-working father of six children, with a voluminous white cravat instead of an open shirt collar,—a very long-tailed coat instead of the picturesque velvet garment of his student days,—a well shaved patient-looking face instead of the mustachioed demi-poetical countenance, which I can still dimly remember, would deprive your recollections of so much of their romance that you would be a happier woman during the rest of your life."

"O, Rupert, I would not see him so for all the world—would not destroy my ideal of all that is noble, poetical, beautiful! O, why have you dimmed the light that so brightly illumined my early days, and even by reflection chased the shadows of the present!"

"Because I want to chase away these imaginary shadows, and I think the patient face and long-tailed coat will greatly assist me."

"But why did you say that he wore a long-tailed coat?" asked Melanie, reproachfully.

"Because he does—just think of him always as I have now described him, and the President will rise enormously in your estimation."

"The President—Wilhelm—I had almost forgotten. This is the anniversary of our wedding-day, and I wrote

some verses to remind him of it; he must have found them on the table when he returned from his walk."

She moved towards a door leading into an adjoining room and softly opened it. The President was seated at a table covered with papers, pamphlets, and writing materials; the concentrated light of a shaded lamp fell on a number of business-like letters, and he was so engaged shoving them into their envelopes that he did not hear his wife's step as she approached him. He was a tall, pale-complexioned, strongly-built man, his head, large in its proportions, was but sparingly-covered with silver-grey hair which did not conceal any part of his high intellectual forehead; beneath his thick and still dark eyebrows were clear light grey eyes, the usual expression of which denoted the earnestness of deep thought, not unfrequently verging on severity; his nose, large and inclining to aquiline, suited well his firmly closing mouth and square-formed chin; his manners were decided, almost haughty; his voice deep and sonorous, was seldom heard in light discourse; he was a man more calculated to inspire respect, perhaps fear, than love; and such had been the case. There was a painful degree of uncertainty, almost diffidence, in Melanie's manner as she approached him, and whispered rather than said, "Wilhelm, did you not find—something—on your table?"

"A pink-papered perfumed piece of poetry!" he answered, taking up a pen and beginning to write the addresses of his letters. "The fact is, Melanie, I have had such a multiplicity of affairs, that I have not had time to read it."

She stretched out her arm with a look of deep mortification to regain possession of the lines, which she felt were disparaged by his alliteration; but he laid his hand on hers, saying, "Don't be offended, it shall be read the moment I have despatched these letters to the minister; this is my last night here, you know, and everything must be in order before I leave this table. I really should be obliged if you would read it for me, or tell me the contents while I seal these papers;" and he lit a taper and began to drop the melting wax, as she turned away, saying,—

“O, it was merely to remind you that this was the anniversary of our wedding-day; it is of no consequence!”

He first pressed his massive seal firmly on the wax, and then turning suddenly round, exclaimed, “But it is of great consequence; why did you not tell me before I went out to walk—I could then have gone to a jeweller’s, and bought you some trinket.”

Melanie coloured violently, and turning to Rupert, who stood in the doorway, she said, in a voice trembling from vexation, “Such are my trials, Rupert; you may laugh at them, but—they are very hard to be borne by any one whose feelings are not quite blunted.”

“Now don’t be absurd, Melanie,” said Count Falkenstein, holding out his hand; “I never could make speeches such as you like to hear, but I am happy to be able to say, that, all things considered, we have worked on very well together these twelve years, and I trust much rational happiness is still in store for us. Next time, take care to let me know the day before, that . . .”

“That you may buy me some trinket,” she said, interrupting him.

“I meant to say brooches and bracelets—you are fond of such things, I know.”

“Believe me that, so bestowed, they have as little value for me . . . as pink-papered perfumed poetry for you!”

“Severe, but just,” said the President, half laughing. “Now, Melanie, don’t be vexed—see, I am going to do a little sentiment for you; until such time as my letters are sealed and despatched, (for business must ever go before pleasure,) your lines shall remain here—in my waistcoat pocket—just over my heart, you see—could any reasonable woman desire more?”

Melanie half smiled.

“Where are you going this evening?” he asked, evidently trying to appear interested about her plans; but he continued writing while he added, “That yellow satin petticoat is perfectly dazzling, and you look uncommonly handsome!”

“Cyrilla is to be presented to the Crown Princess,”

answered Melanie, walking towards a pier glass in order to remove carefully the tears which had gathered in her eyes. A bronze clock commenced striking the hour, the carriage was announced, and a moment after Cyrilla appeared. Rupert sprang towards her, but accustomed to punctuality in time, she only glanced towards her sister, and then hurried down the stairs. As he followed with Melanie, he asked where he should be likely to meet them in the course of the evening. "We are going to the theatre, and afterwards to the Polinskys."

"*Au revoir*, then," cried Rupert gaily; "if I have time I shall be sure to see you again."

The few hours, however, which intervened sufficed to renew all his distrust, and increase his repugnance to a nearer acquaintance with his cousin Cyrilla; so, though curiosity induced him even at a late hour to follow her to the Polinskys, he stationed himself silently near the door of the room in which she was sitting, and contemplated her at what he considered a safe distance. He saw a fair, a very fair girl, youthful-looking to a degree that made the calm nonchalance of her manner remarkable, as she leaned back in a large low crimson chair, quite surrounded by men of various ages, and apparently able to amuse or interest them all. Rupert mistook the ease of habit for coquetry, and muttered, "This is another accomplishment, I suppose; and she has got the start of Melanie here too, without being half as handsome. How could my aunt imagine I should fall in love with that baby face!"

Rupert was himself still too young to appreciate the rounded cheek, the full lip, the eye of which the white is almost blue—the innumerable charms of extreme youth: Melanie's tall full figure, brilliant eyes, and marked regular features, were to him more interesting; and he would perhaps have approached her if he had not suspected, from the wondering faces of those around her, that she was talking either of animal magnetism or ghosts, two subjects which he particularly disliked. Again he looked at Cyrilla, but she had turned away her head; and after a moment's indecision, he walked slowly, almost cautiously, away, as

if he feared his cousin might see him and claim his attention. "For, of course," he thought, "she has got all possible instructions from her mother and aunt how to catch and hold me fast."

"You don't mean to leave so early, Adlerkron," cried Captain Stauffen, of the officers of his regiment; "surely you will wait to hear your cousin sing: if she can do so half as well as she can talk, it is well worth your while."

"Show yourself, at least," said Lieutenant Klemmhain, taking him by the arm; "become visible to the Polinskys, if only for a moment, as I heard the Countess Falkenstein say that her sister must not sing until you had made your appearance."

"Indeed! Then," said Rupert, with a look of intense annoyance, "you may go to her now, and tell her that I have just recollected a most important engagement, which unfortunately will prevent me from hearing my cousin sing just now, but that in a few weeks I hope to see them both at Exfort."

Rupert stood in the street—his carriage was gone, and the cold half-thawed snow penetrated the soles and sides of his thin boots: he stopped and deliberated whether or not he should return; "No, he would not. After all, Melanie *did* know, or at least suspect the plot against him; it showed great want of tact her saying that Cyrilla must wait until he came—his aunts would find her but a bungling matchmaker—and as to Cyrilla, the sooner her hopes were crushed the better; it was his duty to be decided on this occasion."

And he strode down the street, splashing through the wet snow, alike unheeding of it or of the "still small voice" that whispered he was not acting with his usual kindness or consideration for the feelings of others.





CHAPTER VIII.

FXFORT is one of those ancient towns so numerous in Germany, which, from having occupied a distinguished place in the early history of the country, and been deemed worthy of fortification in the middle ages, has had to endure all the vicissitudes of the endless wars of those times. Besieged, pillaged, burnt, it had ever risen, phoenix-like, out of its ashes; and even the last conflagration, and having been twice sacked by the French at a later period, had failed to deprive it of the appearance of a large, populous, and thriving town, though the distance from the coast, and want of a navigable river or extensive commerce, would cause many an Englishman to doubt the fact. The town had, at the conclusion of the last war, been greatly enlivened, in the opinion of its inhabitants, by the old residences of various historically celebrated Mar-grafs and Gau-grafs having been converted into barracks for a numerous and jovial garrison, and also considerably elevated in rank, when it became the seat of a provincial government, with its respectable representatives of civil power, in the persons of assessors, councillors of different classes, &c., &c., &c., and a President!

The President, Count Falkenstein, resided in the government house, which was the largest and handsomest in the town, occupying the whole side of a square called the Platz, and, though the lower part of the building was altogether appropriated to the different offices of the persons employed under him, the second story, with its long

suite of reception rooms, had been reserved altogether for his use, or rather for his wife's, who there, on stated evenings, received, sometimes a select, sometimes a promiscuous society.

Placed by station and fortune in the first rank, Melanie affected to laugh at and despise all social distinctions: she said and tried to believe, that talent and education alone could raise man above his fellows; but she never was known to transgress any of the self-imposed laws which distinguished her class. She spoke French, or demi-French, almost invariably when in company, *tutoied* and called familiarly by their Christian names every member of her own *coterie*, while she was unnecessarily and ostentatiously polite to the less fashion-favoured members of her little world. She aspired in a lady-like sort of way to literary celebrity, and on first coming to Exfort had entertained the idea of combining learning and fashion, and altogether changing the tastes and pursuits of the greater number of her acquaintances. Some years had elapsed since the time of the "three experiments," as she herself laughingly called the three *soirées* in which she had hoped to commence a new era in the Exfort world. To this end, she had signified her intention of giving reading parties, and had induced men of learning and talent to write and read aloud essays on subjects which she judged most appropriate, and likely to arouse the curiosity or engage the attention of her expected audience. The first night her rooms were crowded to suffocation, but the company were manifestly soon weary, and openly showed that they preferred whispering to each other. Some ridiculed what they had heard, others were honest enough to confess that they had not understood what it was all about; but a still greater number declared that it was intolerably dull work, and if they had not been ashamed, they would have gone home at the end of the first half hour; and this sort of shame induced many to appear at the second *soirée*, but the third was literally without guests. Melanie's hopes of being the leader of an intellectual society evaporated, and she henceforward followed the example of others,

giving two or three large balls during the winter, and receiving those who had general invitations to her house twice-a-week in spring and autumn.

At the end of the long suite of reception-rooms was one chosen for constant habitation, because it adjoined the private office of Count Falkenstein. He reserved for himself the privilege of locking the double doors between them when he did not choose to be interrupted in writing, or of opening them when he either wished for society or desired to lengthen his space for walking. The day after Cyrilla's arrival, as she was sitting in this room with her sister, waiting for the announcement of dinner, she heard the President speaking with unusual animation to some one who had entered just as the doors of communication had been opened. Melanie instantly rose and joined them, and Cyrilla soon after distinguished the low tones of an unknown voice inquiring for her cousin Rupert, and asking if he did not mean to come soon to Exfort about the purchase of Freilands.

"I really do not know what his intentions are," replied Melanie in rather an offended tone; "his conduct was altogether so odd, so inexplicable, that even if I had had an opportunity of asking him, I do not think I should have done so."

"I heard you talking to him for a good half-hour," said the President; "but," he added ironically, "I suppose he forgot to ask about the new work which is now in manuscript."

"It was not to me he was so—so uncivil, I may say; it was his neglect of Cyrilla that annoyed me. He saw her for five minutes before she went out the last evening we were in Berlin—promised to follow us to the Polinskys, but when there, never even took the trouble of entering the room we were in; and ended by sending a young officer of his regiment to tell me that he had some engagement which would prevent him from hearing her sing! I naturally thought he would have excused himself the next morning before we left, but he never appeared."

"We left very early," suggested the President.

“That,” said the unknown voice, “is no excuse for Adlerkron. You know he is one of those men who do not know how to enjoy either their position in the world or their wealth; he is, and always was, an earlier riser than most of those unfortunate beings who, like me, are doomed to earn their daily bread.”

“I think, Edouard,” said the President, “that in his place you would have been equally energetic. I am convinced that, under any circumstances, you would be an ambitious and studious man.”

“Studious! yes—perhaps—but with Adlerkron’s fortune I should certainly lead a very different life from his.”

“As to his life,” said Melanie, “it is, I am told, blameless; and though I feel a little angry with him just now on account of Cyrilla, I must say I have seldom met a more generous or good-natured being.”

“O, only too good-natured,” said the same voice. “If I were in his place, the officers of my regiment should not ride my horses without asking my leave; nor should they have free quarters at Windhorst. I consider that sort of good-nature weakness.”

“He is extremely popular,” began Melanie.

“He is considered a good-natured fellow, and perhaps that is the height of his ambition, but it is not mine.”

“And what *is* your ambition?” asked Melanie.

“Nothing less than to be finance minister some twenty years hence!”

“You are right, Edouard,” cried the President; “if circumstances favour your views, I know no one whose talents would more fit them for the office.”

“In the meantime,” said Melanie, walking into the drawing-room, “let me introduce you to my sister. Cyrilla, this is our nephew, Count Zorndoff.”

He was a young and uncommonly handsome man; the extreme paleness of his features rendered still more remarkable by his jet black hair and large dark eyes; his manners were quiet, his voice low, and peculiarly agreeable. Though perfectly well dressed, there was an evident carelessness in the minutiae of his toilet which most people

thought and said proceeded from the consciousness that his personal advantages permitted negligence. Those who so judged were in error. Few, none perhaps, understood his character at all, for few or none ever study the characters of those with whom they are not obliged to live; and many, very many, pass through this world without ever having studied any character at all, merely taking people as they find them, and feeling a sort of vague surprise when others act differently from what they would have done in their places. These are like children turning over the leaves of a book of prints, under which the explanations are written in a language unknown to them. The representations of scenes of domestic life they can understand, though even there much is passed over unnoticed; but should the picture present anything new or uncommon, after having looked at it for a short time with a mixture of curiosity and wonder, they turn over the leaf, unconscious of the fund of deep interest, or subject of profound thought, which they have lost. The study of character may be compared to the acquirement of a new science or language; the more cultivated the mind, the less felt are the first difficulties; and these once overcome, a world of hitherto unknown ideas come crowding on us, or intellectual treasures are within our reach which may afford us occupation and enjoyment for the rest of our lives. This digression is not intended as a prelude to a dissection of Count Zorndorff's head or heart: like Cyrilla, we will see him as he chose to appear to her, and that was, cold and indifferent. He talked politics without intermission during dinner, retired afterwards with the President to his study; and when he again appeared in the drawing-room, he addressed all his conversation in a half-whisper to Melanie.

The President requested Cyrilla to sing; and while he leaned back in his chair, an expression of perfect satisfaction stealing over his stern features, Count Zorndorff ceased speaking, but, bending over a book, appeared altogether unconscious of all that was going on about him. As the clock struck ten, he rose, nodded a good night to his uncle, murmured a few words to his aunt, and, slightly bowing to Cyrilla, left the room.

“Well,” cried Melanie, turning with a look of half-suppressed triumph to her sister: “well, Cyrilla, what do you think of him?”

“You mean Count Zorndorff? I hardly know—I spoke so little to him—he seems gentlemanlike.”

“My dear creature, are you blind? He is probably the handsomest man you ever saw in your life!”

“Very likely; but I did not observe him attentively.”

The President looked up and smiled. “Edouard has for once made no impression,” he said quietly; “Cyrilla is too rational to waste admiration on a head, without knowing what sort of brain may be in it. I believe it is Plato who says ‘mind alone is beautiful.’”

“He meant that the appreciation of beauty depends upon the mind,” said Melanie; “and the more intellect we have . . . the stronger our imagination may be . . . so much the more intense is the perception of the beautiful! I must say, Cyrilla, I never saw any one so devoid of feeling for beauty as you are!”

“I think on the present occasion it is a most fortunate circumstance,” said Count Falkenstein.

“I cannot agree with you, Wilhelm; it is a loss of incalculable pleasure a person not having a perception of what is beautiful, be the object picture, statue, man, or woman.”

“Hum . . .,” said Count Falkenstein, rubbing his chin. “The perception of a woman’s beauty *is* sometimes necessary to make a man overlook her foibles.”

Melanie moved in silent dignity towards a marble table, on which three small antique silver candlesticks were placed, and began to occupy herself in lighting the candles they held.

“I think,” said Cyrilla, apologetically, “indeed I am almost sure I should have observed Count Zorndorff more had he spoken to me, or had he appeared to like music.”

“Edouard loses ‘incalculable pleasure’ by having no ear for music,” said Count Falkenstein.

“He has no dislike to vocal music,” cried Melanie, eagerly; “no dislike whatever when he can hear the words distinctly.”

“That is,” said the Count, “he has no objection to receiving a poetical idea even through the medium of song!”

“I think, Wilhelm, it is extremely injudicious your endeavouring to prejudice Cyrilla against a person with whom she must associate so constantly.”

“And I think, Melanie, it is still more injudicious your endeavouring to prepossess her in favour of a person who is . . . is a . . . is decidedly the worst *parti* in Exfort.”

Cyrilla laughed. “To relieve both your minds,” she said, “let me assure you that I am neither prejudiced nor prepossessed, nor,” she added with a slight blush, “nor have I come to Exfort to look for a *parti*.”

“Well,” said the President, “all I have to say is, that I hope you have made as little impression on my nephew as he seems to have made on you. It is a fortunate circumstance for him that his heart is not as vulnerable through his ears as mine.”

“You need have no apprehensions on Edouard’s account,” observed Melanie, “for, however Cyrilla’s appearance might attract him, she is not in other respects at all suited to him. I have seldom seen two people so different in disposition.”

“So much the better,” rejoined Count Falkenstein, “so much the better; but you see sometimes people like those who are precisely the contrary of what they are themselves—I give myself as an example. Can any two people in the world be more unlike than we are?”

“I flatter myself that it is not possible,” answered Melanie, as she left the room.

Cyrilla stopped at her sister’s door for a moment and said, “I should like to know why you never mentioned Count Zorndorff’s name to me. I had no idea that you had a nephew here.”

“He has not been long in Exfort,” answered Melanie evasively, “only since he became *Kammer Assessor*. Our other nephews, the Falkensteins, are not to be compared to him; but they will nevertheless inherit all we possess, while poor Edouard must work his way on in the world as he best can. It is this which makes him so melancholy—so discontented—at times almost a misanthrope.”

“But,” said Cyrilla, “how many men in this world are similarly situated, without being either melancholy or misanthropical?”

“Very likely; but not such men as Edouard. I never see him and Rupert together, without wishing they could change places: Rupert’s simple habits and thoughtless hilarity are perfectly adapted to a life of the commonest description; whereas Edouard’s refinement, almost amounting to morbid sensibility, will make him, if chance or interest do not favour his ambition, the most wretched of men!”

“Good-night,” said Cyrilla, turning away; “you have quite convinced me that he is not at all likely to suit me, even as an acquaintance . . . and I suppose he is here every day?”

“He *is* here every day, and you will be so unavoidably thrown together, that I wrote to him about you from Berlin . . . I will be candid with you, dear Cyrilla, and tell you that your appearance is so ideal, so essentially poetical and refined, that I trembled for his peace of mind, and . . .”

“And,” said Cyrilla, interrupting her, “and recommended him to be almost uncivil to me? He ought to be very much obliged to you for your care of his happiness. May I ask why you did not think it necessary to warn me too?”

“Your education,” answered Melanie, “must have been very different from what I supposed, if you could waste a serious thought on any one in his circumstances. I am sure you have received ample instruction on this subject.”

“Perhaps so,” replied Cyrilla; “but there are some things I have not been able to learn, and this happens to be one of them. Mamma and Fernanda used to discuss such matters occasionally before me, and talked very rationally and wisely, no doubt . . . but I—would rather like to believe that there is such a thing as . . . love . . . in this world.”

“There is—there is!” cried Melanie enthusiastically. “There is, and no wealth or station can supply its place. Oh, Cyrilla, if you would not lead a life of endless regrets,

never let anything tempt you to marry a man without feeling, and being assured that he also feels for you that description of love which alone is genuine,—a love inspired by congeniality of mind! Love deserves not the name if it be not based on sentiment, and elevated by a mysterious combination of spirits! Good-night, dearest," she added, hastily retreating into her room; "I hear Wilhelm already in his dressing-room. To-morrow we will discuss this important question more at length."

"Melanie is very—very sentimental," thought Cyrilla, as she walked towards her room, "but she is very charming also. Poor thing! I know she was persuaded to marry the President without caring for him, and I now begin to suspect she liked some one else better. I wish I could see the letter she wrote to that Count Zorndorff; it must have made a great impression on him, for, after the first rather disagreeable steady stare, he never again looked at me the whole evening."





CHAPTER IX.

DAYS and weeks passed—Cyrilla's friends and acquaintances multiplied with that facility so common to youth—so impossible in later years. In many houses, where she found companions of her own age, she became intimate, and was not a little annoyed occasionally at the number of questions which were asked her about her cousin Rupert—If he did not intend to purchase Freilands?—Had he not said he would retire from the army and settle near Exfort?—Whom did she suppose he was likely to marry?—Did she not think him quite a love?—Had she ever heard any amateur sing so well as he did? &c., &c., &c. And not one of these questions, simple as they were, could she answer, though they concerned one of her nearest relations. Rupert's neglect was thus made so very apparent, that she first felt piqued, then almost angry, whenever he was named. Some of her other friends were not less curious concerning the intentions and movements of Count Zorndorff, who they knew almost lived in his uncle's house; and it was in vain that Cyrilla assured them that she was scarcely acquainted with and never spoke to him; they were incredulous, and well they might be, for on the evenings that the Countess Falkenstein was "at home," they had observed that he followed her from room to room, stood near her, listened to what she said, occasionally joined in the conversation, and all with that appearance of careless intimacy which men, who have lived in the world, know so well how to assume towards very young women; but

none could know, nor could Cyrilla explain, that when they met the next day at dinner a relapse had taken place, and he was again frigid or indifferent to her, and exclusively occupied with his uncle and aunt.

One afternoon, as he sat in the drawing-room with his arms crossed, apparently in deepest reverie, Melanie approached Cyrilla, who was painting in water-colours, and pointing to Zorndorff, asked her to make a sketch of him. "It will not be difficult," she added, "as he is so quiet—he has not moved for the last ten minutes."

"Oh, nothing can be easier," said Cyrilla gaily; "he is quite a man of marble—unmoved—immoveable. I can sketch his face without looking at him—Look here—so?"

Melanie bent over her, exclaiming, "Excellent! nothing could be more like! What an extraordinary talent for taking likenesses you must have!"

"I believe," said Cyrilla, as she carelessly gave the outline of the figure, "I believe this is rather an exercise of memory—Shall I colour the head a little?"

"Oh pray do."

In the meantime the man of marble was sitting upright, his pale cheek slightly flushed, his dark eyes flashing, and an expression of surprise and pleasure pervading every feature of his face.

"I think," suggested Melanie, "you might give a *little* more colour."

"Not a bit," said Cyrilla, decidedly.

"I liked your sketch better," continued Melanie; "the outline was perfect."

"It is there still," rejoined Cyrilla; "this slight washing in of colour cannot have changed it."

"It is there and not there," said Melanie; "you have given a cold, haughty, discontented expression to the head now."

"'Tis memory's sketch," said Cyrilla, throwing down her pencil, "and it is so," she added, slightly shrugging her shoulders, "that Count Zorndorff's head appears to me—almost—always."

Melanie walked with the drawing in her hand into the

next room to show it to the President. Count Zorndorff rose, approached Cyrilla, sat down in a chair beside her, and having watched her for a few minutes, as she replaced her colours and deposited her pallets in the box, he observed, in his usual low well modulated voice, "I am sorry my head has made so disagreeable an impression on you, Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron; will you allow me to accuse you of some injustice in your judgment of me?"

"Of your head—not of you."

"My head! why that's myself—my all—all I have in the world! My head, with some mechanical assistance on the part of my hands, must earn my bread, give me clothes—a roof to cover me, and perhaps some of those luxuries which civilization has rendered almost necessary to life!"

"We spoke merely of the expression of your features," observed Cyrilla.

"You said I appeared to you cold and haughty," continued Zorndorff; "I am neither the one nor the other."

"Very likely," said Cyrilla, playing with her pencil, "it may be the regularity of your features which gives them an expression of severity."

"I am not severe, not haughty, and but too surely not cold." Had Cyrilla looked at him, she would have believed the latter assertion, at least; she did not, and he continued: "Cold! As cold as Hecla under its crust of ice! To the charge of discontent I plead guilty."

"Melanie calls it melancholy, and the word sounds better," observed Cyrilla, smiling.

"Let us call it by the right name—discontent. I am altogether dissatisfied with myself, my lot in life—in short, with the whole world."

"And I find such discontent so unreasonable, that, instead of commiserating, I feel inclined to laugh at you; and would do so if I knew you well enough," said Cyrilla, moving back her chair.

"Stay, Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron, one moment You said, or implied that I . . . or, if you will my *head*, was not always disagreeable to you."

“Did I? I suppose I meant that in society you looked more amiable than you do for us every day here.”

“You could scarcely make a remark calculated to place me in a more disadvantageous light; and it is not altogether without foundation, nor without cause. With you the case is exactly the contrary; you are a thousand times more charming, a thousand times more fascinating, when we are quite alone than when you are seen in a crowd.”

“Your words admit of a double sense,” said Cyrilla, laughing; “you may mean that I am a cheerful sort of person, with whom it is pleasant to pass a few hours every day, or . . .”

“Pleasant! oh, something more than pleasant.”

“Or you may mean that I am too insignificant to be observed among others.”

“You are lost, or rather thrown away, like an exotic flower in a gardener’s table-bouquet,” said Zorndorff, with increasing animation. “One never can admire a flower as it deserves, until it is seen alone. A rosebud for instance is, with all its intrinsic beauty, a flower but little observed when, with jessamines, jonquils, geraniums, and dozens of others, it composes a part of those pyramidical bouquets which gardeners love to form. . . . I never see one of them without thinking of a ball-room—I am never in a ball-room without thinking of a bouquet.”

“A very nice idea,” said Cyrilla, leaning back in her chair, half amused, half indifferent.

“In looking at a bouquet of this description,” continued Zorndorff, “one seldom singles out a flower for particular admiration.” He paused a moment, and then added, “Let me, however, take one—a rosebud, a lily, or what you will, and let me place it in a glass of water; give me time to examine and admire it at leisure, and I shall soon think it most beautiful—most perfect—and wonder that, even among the others, I had not instantly sought one like it.”

“You are right,” said Cyrilla; “all plants are beautiful when carefully examined; and,” she said, bending over the paper before her, and almost unconsciously beginning to sketch rosebuds and lilies, “and really the whole idea is so poetical, that you might put it into verse.”

“Are you laughing at me?” he asked, calmly.

“No, I was only thinking of what Melanie told me a few days ago.”

“What did she tell you?”

“That you had written some delightfully wild, despairing poems, and published them under a feigned name.”

“A youthful folly that I hoped had been forgotten,” said Zorndorff, smiling.

“She said also,” continued Cyrilla, archly, “that you could talk poetical prose sometimes.”

“That was not my intention just now,” said Zorndorff, rising; “but if you cannot, or will not, understand my allegory, let me tell you, in plain words, that however safe I may imagine myself when I see you surrounded by others, you might become dangerous to my peace of mind were I to yield to the inclination I constantly feel of conversing unrestrainedly with you.”

Cyrilla looked at him for a moment in astonishment. Some confused thoughts of an ice-covered volcano, bouquets, ball-rooms, and buds of roses, passed through her mind—then came the tolerably clear idea that Count Zorndorff, the cold impenetrable man of marble, had not been, or was not so insensible, as she had supposed. A feeling of gratified vanity was succeeded by a smile of unequivocal pleasure, that changed into a merry laugh, in which she was joined by Zorndorff, even while he said, “I wish you would always laugh, and then I should have nothing to fear.”

“You would have nothing to fear!” repeated Melanie, joining them. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“I have been endeavouring to explain to your sister my motives for avoiding her society, and wish I could make her understand that I am not always the dull disagreeable fellow I have been for the last six weeks.”

“Dull and disagreeable! I am sure Cyrilla never thought”

“Excuse me, Melanie. I certainly did at least think your praises of Count Zorndorff a little exaggerated—that he was not dull, I could discover by his conversation with

others ; but, as far as I am concerned, I must say he is the only man I ever found actually ungracious to me, and . . . and rather disagreeable than otherwise."

"That was more than I intended," cried Zorndorff, with unusual warmth ; "but a medium in such cases is not possible, and henceforth I will be—myself—such as I am."

"Edouard, dear Edouard," cried Melanie, with a look of alarm, "have you forgotten all I said to you ?"

"No ; I remember it perfectly, and some other things too ; but it is absurd avoiding present pleasure from a vague fear that it may increase future misery. Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron shall never again have cause to complain of my ungraciousness."

The announcement of dinner ended the conversation, but Cyrilla's interest was excited, and the more so, as her sister's countenance assumed an unusual gravity. Zorndorff did not that day, or ever after, follow his uncle into his study, but joining Melanie and Cyrilla after dinner, read or talked to them the whole evening.





CHAPTER X.



ZORNDORFF'S explanation made a deep and lasting impression on Cyrilla, nor was his manner afterwards calculated to weaken it. If he did not positively seek her society he at least never seemed to avoid it; and, when they were together, he talked naturally, and apparently without reserve, on every subject, allowing himself to be laughed at for his fastidious tastes, and listening gravely to her lectures on the irrationality of inordinate ambition. Too proud to be vain, he was evidently perfectly indifferent to his very uncommon personal advantages, and in proportion as Cyrilla observed this, she became aware of them, acquiring by degrees a sense of the "beautiful" which might even have satisfied her sister, had she thought proper again to question her. Day by day Zorndorff rose in her estimation—how could it be otherwise? The President consulted him on important business. Melanie's encomiums were unceasing, and they no longer appeared exaggerated to Cyrilla. In the society of Exfort, he was, by common consent, the leader of fashion, without having given himself the slightest trouble to obtain that eminence; and Cyrilla could not long remain unconscious that, even against his will, she had begun to "endanger his peace of mind." She pardoned, as every woman in her place would have done, the occasional glances that betrayed this secret—forgave him sooner than he did himself, and felt a degree of compassion for his magnanimous struggles that almost verged on tenderness. It was these same efforts on his

part to overcome and conceal his growing admiration and regard that gave peculiar interest to their intercourse. She began to understand why he was discontented, and even to entertain vague wishes that she had been born an heiress; but it was not until he had been absent for some days in Berlin, that she discovered how extremely insipid all other men were—how very necessary his society must be to his aunt and uncle! Perhaps she was glad when he returned to Exfort. She gave him her hand for a moment, but it was singular that, as Melanie warmly welcomed him, and added the assurance that they had found it almost impossible to live without him, Cyrilla said not one word, but, bending over her work, slightly averted her face, which had suddenly become flushed in a very unusual manner. Zorndorff was not at all hurt at her silence. On the contrary, a look of surprise was quickly followed by a smile of satisfaction, and a visible exhilaration of spirits, that lasted for some time.

“I saw your cousin Rupert very often,” he observed, after a pause.

“Did you?” said Cyrilla, carelessly.

Zorndorff laughed. “I expected,” he continued, “to have been stormed with questions about the movements of so very important a person.”

“Important!” repeated Cyrilla; “I really was not aware of his importance.”

“Why, is he not the head and hope of your family?” he asked ironically.

“That may give him importance in the eyes of my aunt in Salzburg; but, for my part”

“For your part,” said Melanie, “I can easily imagine that a little common civility, a very slight show of regard when you were in Berlin, would have raised him in your opinion far more than all his possessions. I hope, Edouard, you gave him no information whatever about Cyrilla.”

“He did not ask for any.”

“You don’t mean to say that he did not speak of us at all.”

“Not exactly; he hoped you were all well, or something

to that purport. You know, of course, that he has purchased Freilands, and intends to furnish the house magnificently."

"I am in total ignorance of everything concerning him."

"He will be here to-morrow to give you any information you may desire."

"To-morrow!" repeated Melanie; then, turning to her sister, she added, "Cyrilla, you will really do me a favour by endeavouring to be out of the way when he arrives—by avoiding him for a day or two."

"I don't think he will observe whether I am here or not," said Cyrilla, half-laughing.

"But, Edouard, don't you think we ought to punish him in some way for his neglect?" asked Melanie.

"Yes; but, if I may offer an opinion, I should say that a quiet system of indifference during his stay here would be better than avoiding him in any manner that would lead to explanations."

"It is not easy to be indifferent with him—he is too good-natured; and then, you know, he cannot endure the idea of having offended any one, and will be sure to explain or apologize in some queer way, or make us forget what he has done by doing something else."

"Let us tell him at once how good-for-nothing we think him—how offended we are," suggested Cyrilla.

"He will misunderstand you," said Zorndorff, "and be persuaded you are making advances to him; indeed, if you do not carefully weigh all your actions and words, he will in all probability think you have serious intentions on his heart and hand."

"That is true," said Cyrilla; "I had forgotten that weakness of his."

"That folly!" said Zorndorff, with a slight sneer.

The President, who had entered the room while they were speaking, observed, "If you knew as much of Rupert as I do, you would excuse him for entertaining some fears of people having designs upon him: he has had a good deal of experience in that way. Edouard might have been able to give you information enough on the subject, if he

had not just about that time been too much occupied with his own affairs—eh, Edouard?”

Zorndorff bit his lip, and murmured something about the love affairs of students being seldom of much importance.

“You must not say that, Edouard; we may hope there are exceptions, and that . . .”

“Excuse me for interrupting you,” said Zorndorff, rising hastily; “but you have just reminded me that I have a long message for you from old Sommerfeld about the last loan in which he was concerned.”

“A very natural transition,” said Count Falkenstein; “but first tell me how the old man has borne his son’s death.”

“He is resigned, but looks ill, and remains for hours without speaking. His daughter is very uneasy about him.”

“Sorry to hear it: her brother’s death must have been a great shock to her in her delicate state of health.”

“We—I mean she—has been expecting it nearly two years,” said Zorndorff; “it was at last quite a release.”

“But she seemed to me a person of such remarkably strong feelings . . .”

“Oh yes, horribly strong feelings,” said Zorndorff, shrugging his shoulders.

“Her fortune will now be immense,” observed the President.

“It will,” said Zorndorff; “but she cannot purchase health with it.”

“I remember hearing something of these Sommerfelds,” said Melanie; “bankers—enormously rich; but I never met them anywhere, did I?”

“Perhaps not; but their wealth makes them remarkable enough, and it is now all centred in one woman,” answered the President.

“I pity her,” said Melanie; “any woman with a fortune sufficiently large to tempt adventurers is to be pitied: better to be penniless and have the certainty of being chosen for oneself alone!”

“And what is the use of being chosen if choice is out of *our* power?” asked Cyrilla, quietly. “I should not hesi-

tate to take the fortune and my chance for happiness, if it were offered me. The relations of penniless women," she added, laughing, "are generally so unreasonable as to expect them to be satisfied with a house and home, and to take thankfully whatever they may find in it."

"The relations of men in the same predicament," said Zorndorff, "have not unfrequently the same idea."

"A man marrying from motives of interest is unpardonable," began Cyrilla.

"Not more so than a woman's doing so," cried Zorndorff, walking across the room to where she was sitting; "and moreover, he risks his happiness less than a woman in a similar case."

"He deserves to lose it altogether," rejoined Cyrilla; "for a man by application and industry can provide for himself and secure an independence; but what can we do?"

"I am afraid there is little doubt as to what Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron will do," muttered Zorndorff, turning to his uncle with a forced smile.

"Let us hope," said the President gravely, "that in her case prudence and inclination may point to the same person."

The next day Rupert arrived. At Melanie's request, as he walked in at one door, Cyrilla disappeared through another. His visit was short and hurried; he promised to come again the next day, and—did not inquire for Cyrilla. Melanie's indignation was unbounded, Cyrilla blushed, Zorndorff laughed, the President asked what was the matter, but no one chose to explain. "It was not worth his notice—mere nonsense." Count Falkenstein did not like nonsense, and asked no further question. So profound was the respect entertained for him by all his household, that they never ventured to make him acquainted with any of those little domestic events and jests that, after all, make the sum of private life. Yet he was not an ill-tempered man, or a tyrant, but so unbendingly master, that he was approached with reverence, spoken to with reserve, and—avoided as much as possible.

The day following, Cyrilla purposely and willingly went out, and Melanie received her cousin Rupert with a re-

served dignity, which, however, was altogether unperceived by him. Provokingly unconscious of his disgrace, he walked about the room, examining the books, and turning over the music, until he seated himself at Cyrilla's drawing-table, and, in the contemplation of her sketches, remained for some time quite quiet.

"How well she draws!" he observed abruptly.

"Meaning Cyrilla?" asked Melanie.

"Exactly—where is she?"

"Gone out."

"When is she likely to return?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you? that's odd. Did you not tell her that I intended to come here to-day?"

"Of course; but—she had an engagement"

"Really! not very important, most probably!"

"Why—no—it is precisely of the same description as yours the evening you had not time to speak to her in Berlin."

"Ah, she is offended with me!"

"Not as much as I should have been in her place, but quite enough to prevent her from feeling any *empressement* to see you."

"Oh, I don't want or wish for anything of that kind," said Rupert; "quite the contrary; but still, Melanie, I believe I had better dine with you to-day, and work out a reconciliation with her, or else she may refuse to go to Freilands."

"She has been there already: we got up a pic-nic on purpose to show it to her."

"I don't mean pic-nics," said Rupert; "I expect you all to come and stay with me,—the President can drive into Exfort every morning and return to dinner."

"But," said Melanie, with a smile, "the furniture is a—of rather too pastoral a description to admit of your receiving company. There are, I allow, garden chairs and deal tables in profusion, but"

Rupert laughed. "Do not be alarmed, my dear Melanie; I know that, much as you like reading and writing pastorals,

there is nothing you dread so much in reality, and you are the very last person in the world I should think of inviting to garden chairs and deal tables! My furniture has long been ordered, and about a dozen rooms are already in a very habitable state—it was about yours that I was in such a hurry yesterday. You once said that you liked rose-coloured furniture, because it was becoming to people with dark hair, or something of that sort; and so”

“How is it possible that you can remember what I most probably said years ago?” asked Melanie with some surprise: “it must have been about the time that my boudoir was being newly furnished!”

“Precisely,—but I should perhaps have forgotten your remark if I had not afterwards seen you in the boudoir, and found that in rose-coloured light you were perfectly irresistible. There you sat as usual composing verses; but, even while scanning the lines, you arranged a casket of jewels, which gave your appearance such a charming mixture of occident and orient that added to your black hair, for which I have always had a sort of passion: I—at once, and without hesitation, fell desperately in love with you.”

“Nonsense, Rupert!”

“Fact, I assure you. If my poor uncle were alive he could bear witness, for to him I told my love!”

“Well,” said Melanie laughing, “and what did he say?”

“He said it was the best thing that could have happened to me,—that a sentimental fancy for a woman of talent and fashion, such as you were, would be of the greatest advantage to me, and form my manners better than anything else in the world; so you see you have unconsciously assisted in my education.”

“If that be the case,” said Melanie, “I must say you have shown your gratitude for my services in rather an extraordinary way. No one, not even Wilhelm, has ever so openly turned me into ridicule as you have!”

“That,” said Rupert, “is the most curious thing of all; when actually in the act of laughing at you, I admired you, and would not for any consideration have had you other than you were!”

“ Allow me to doubt the existence of your admiration, Rupert.”

“ No, I won't,—when you believe so many other queer things, you must believe that too. I assure you, just before you left Berlin and came to settle here, I had begun to think it quite possible that between us (notwithstanding our difference of disposition) a mysterious sympathy of souls”

“ Spirits, not souls,” said Melanie, gravely interrupting him.

“ You used to say souls.”

“ I don't think I did; but at all events Edouard has convinced me of the disadvantages of an incorrect use of the expressions, body, soul, and spirit: the body is what we have in common with plants and the lowest order of animals,—the soul is neither more nor less than the invisible being or life of the body: by so speaking, we give ourselves merely the highest rank among animals.”

Rupert looked attentive, and she continued: “ Now, though some animals in the creation bear a strong resemblance, both in form and organization, to man, there is, in fact, an impassable gulf between them. It is the intellect or spirit that gives us a place quite alone in the creation.”

“ O ho!” cried Rupert; “ this sounds better than the ghosts and goblins about which you used to talk so much last year, after having read Justinus Kerner's *Somnambulist of Prevorst*. I suppose Zorndorff got tired of pretending to believe such a heap of marvellous imaginings, and has endeavoured to turn your mind to something else.”

“ You are quite mistaken, Rupert; however, all I want to explain to you is, that to prevent a confusion of ideas, one should in speaking, instead of body, use the word soul, which expresses its life and being, and for what is commonly called the immortal soul—the word spirit.”

“ Soul and spirit,” repeated Rupert, “and no body at all! But, if I am not mistaken, Kerner's *Somnambulist* also says, that in death the spirit will be separated from the soul as well as from the brain and heart.”

“ It will,” cried Melanie eagerly; “ and if you once

agree to the correctness of the terms soul and spirit, all confusion ceases,—all unnecessary wonder about the union of such different things as spirit and body ceases : we have only to take the soul as a connecting link, if you have no objection”

“None whatever,” said Rupert, closing Cyrilla’s portfolio and coming towards her.

“Then, Rupert, you see, between spirit and soul there is sufficient resemblance to admit of amalgamation ; for while spirit is immaterial, quite distinct from matter, the soul, as vital or directive principle of the body, is not without a certain consciousness of being, although it cannot in thinking and imagining arrive at taking itself as an object of thought or forming the idea of an idea.”

“We will talk of all this some other day when I have more time,” said Rupert rising ; “and I may, I hope, now congratulate you on having formed an ‘idea of an idea’ which, I trust, will put to flight all the apparitions which were so destructive to your peace of mind when you chanced to be in a room alone, or in the dark.”

“Why, not exactly,” answered Melanie, with some embarrassment, “for you see the two systems admit of”

“An amalgamation ?” cried Rupert. “My dear Melanie, that would take long to prove, and must also be deferred to some other day. I ought to be off now, if I mean to give you the pleasure of my company at dinner.”

“Try to be here in right time, Rupert,—you know Wilhelm cannot endure having to wait.”

“Then don’t wait one minute for me. I say, Melanie,” he added, stopping at the door, “I wish you would prevent Zorndorff from talking about religion or philosophy before Cyrilla. She is very young, you know, and he might fill her mind with doubts and perplexities.”

“And I say, Rupert, you seem to have a most erroneous idea of Cyrilla. It is true she is young, but she has read, heard, and seen much more than you suppose, and can support her opinions as well as can be expected from . . . a woman.”

“Oh, I have the highest possible opinion of her intellect

and education, I assure you; nevertheless, you must allow that philosophical speculations are useless, if not dangerous, for most people. What has been the result of all our systems? A collection of curious hypotheses, for the fabrication of which we Germans are as celebrated as the English for their cutlery, or the Genevese for watches."

"But," said Melanie, "many things are taught at our universities under the name of philosophy that are both interesting and instructive, without being at all dangerous."

"You know very well that was not what I meant,—I referred to Zorndorff's scepticism."

"Oh, I assure you he is greatly improved in that respect. Cyrilla has been of great use to him."

"Indeed!"

"He goes to church quite regularly now, pays the greatest attention to the sermon, and talks of it afterwards with us. Last Sunday he took notes, and repeated the whole sermon in the evening almost word for word."

"In mockery?" exclaimed Rupert, his brows slightly contracted.

"Not at all, perfectly seriously—he is remarkably eloquent; you must hear him some day."

"No, thank you," said Rupert, as he strode towards the door; "I prefer hearing a less eloquent discourse from some one authorized to preach,—from a man like Englmann, whose practice is a living sermon of the doctrines he professes."





CHAPTER XI.



MELANIE'S remark, that Rupert could not endure the idea of having offended any one, was perfectly correct. Although intending to show his indifference to, and if necessary, his determination not to marry his cousin, no sooner had he heard that she was annoyed at his neglect, than he felt sorry for it, and wished to make amends. When about half way to Freilands, the voice of conscience became so clamorous and reproachful that he turned his horse's head, rode quickly back to Exfort, dressed for dinner, and hurried to the Government House, a full hour before he was expected. Cyrilla and Zorndorff were in the drawing-room, the door into the President's study was open, and his heavy step was audible, as he paced backwards and forwards, while dictating in a low voice to his secretary. Cyrilla was reading, Zorndorff writing, when Rupert was announced, and they both looked up as he entered.

Nodding familiarly to Zorndorff, he advanced quickly towards Cyrilla, stooped down and kissed her cheek; but it was with a nonchalance, made rather too evident by the fact, that, at the same moment, he drew off his gloves, and his eyes wandered round the room in search of Melanie. Now Cyrilla, like all young and pretty women, was not disposed to submit willingly to mere duty kisses; she would rather have dispensed with them altogether, and endeavoured, by a very significant shake of her head, to demonstrate her impatience under the infliction; she even bent over her book, and pretended to read, as, with a

laudable effort to look grave and penitent, he said, "I hear you are offended with me, Cyrilla, and I acknowledge not altogether without reason; nevertheless, I hope you will forgive my—inattention—carelessness—thoughtlessness—or whatever name you may choose to give my offence, when I . . . but perhaps the best thing I could do would be to tell you the real cause of it!"

"If there be a cause," replied Cyrilla, while she quietly played with the leaves of her book, "if there be a cause, not one of the words you have used is the right name for what you have done—or rather not done!"

"Why Melanie herself could not have given me a better answer," cried Rupert, laughing; "I did not expect you to weigh my words in that matter."

"Of course not," cried Cyrilla; "I have heard from Melanie that you consider me quite a child."

"When I saw you last, dear Cyrilla, you were a child; the intervening years have passed quickly, and you are scarcely at all changed—I mean in features. Even these long fair curls are just what they used to be. Oh why," he said, lightly touching them; "why are they not black, or even dark brown?"

"Because I am an Adlerkron Windhorst," answered Cyrilla, laughing; "and while they remind you of our near relationship, they tell you, as plainly as words could do, that their colour can never in any way interest or concern you."

"Do they? I wonder if your mother would allow . . . your curls to speak in this manner to me—my aunt certainly would not."

"What mamma would permit, I don't know; what my aunt—I don't care."

"Then she did say something to you about it?"

"About what?" asked Cyrilla, looking up inquiringly.

"About me."

"Not a word—not a syllable—but I heard from others that you had the ridiculous weakness of imagining that every woman who was commonly civil to you must necessarily wish to marry you!"

“Who could have traduced me in this manner!” exclaimed Rupert, while a blush of mixed annoyance and shame spread over his features. “What a weak vain fool you must think me!”

“Not exactly,” said Cyrilla; “for the person who gave me the information more than hinted that it was your possessions, and not your person, that you suspected to be the object of all designing womankind.”

Rupert remained silent for more than a minute.

“It seems,” added Cyrilla, “that you cannot quite deny the charge.”

“I was not thinking of it,” replied Rupert, “I—I wish we were alone—I should like to be perfectly candid with you.”

“*He* is too busy writing to hear us,” said Cyrilla, glancing towards Zorndorff; “but we can go to the sofa at the window, if you choose.”

And to the sofa they went, and Rupert, without hesitation or reserve, whispered the whole story of his aunt's plans. Cyrilla did not attach the importance to his communication which he had expected, and seemed to think the whole affair very amusing; but the merry answer and light laugh that served so completely to re-assure him, equally effectually destroyed the equanimity of Count Zorndorff. She had thought him too busy writing to hear; but he *had* heard Rupert, with all the familiarity of near relationship, call his cousin “dear Cyrilla,” and use the pronoun, *Du*, the tutoiement, *Dutzen*, as it is called in Germany, which in itself removes at once all obstacles to perfect intimacy: he saw Cyrilla go with him to a distant sofa, and whisper and laugh! And there they were now, as if they had been together all their lives, talking of places and people he knew nothing about!

He stopped writing, leaned his head on his hand, and indulged in a long reverie of a more serious than agreeable nature, the result of which seemed to be a determination not to look at or disturb the conversation of the cousins, for he took up his papers and walked with them into the President's study.

"Ah, I'm so much obliged to Zorndorff for taking himself off," observed Rupert.

"I'm afraid we have disturbed him," said Cyrilla, "and he was writing something of consequence for his uncle."

"What made him bring anything of that kind to write in *this* room?"

"He says he likes the temperature here, and the perfume of the flowers," replied Cyrilla.

"Luxurious fellow!" exclaimed Rupert; "unchanged, unchangeable! but a . . . what were we talking about? My uncle Carl? or . . . the time we were at Aix . . . or, no . . . our aunt in Salzburg, I believe . . . Dreadful woman, isn't she?"

"Most unamiable, most disagreeable," said Cyrilla.

"And then her stinginess! what one suffers from cold in her house is intolerable!"

"Thank Heaven, I have never been obliged to live with her," rejoined Cyrilla.

"But I was," said Rupert, "and longer than I liked. However, directly I left the university, I proposed travelling, and when my uncle refused his consent, I went into the army—more to get away from her than for anything else. As long as my uncle lived, his house, of course, remained my head-quarters, but when she became a widow, I decamped altogether. Had she married General Zorndorff, as we expected, though it would have half disinherited me, I might have been tempted to stay with them, more for the fun of the thing, however, than because I happened at the time to be his aid-de-camp."

"General Zorndorff!" repeated Cyrilla, "any relation of . . ."

"Only his father, but as different a man as can well be imagined: they had been engaged to each other during some of those years of revolution which now belong to history, but being both hot-tempered, they quarrelled, and mutually returned all letters and locks of hair. The war separated them, and our aunt married uncle Gottfried."

"What a life he must have led with her?" observed Cyrilla.

“Not so bad as you suppose. He was one of those quiet sort of men who do what they like themselves, and let others do the same; they never interfered with each other. He attended to his wide-spreading speculations, employed his leisure hours in the arrangement of my affairs, as you know he was my guardian, and his wife amused herself with her *house friend*.”

“Her house friend!” repeated Cyrilla, “and who was that?”

“They were numerous. I can remember at least half-a-dozen.”

“I did not think she had so many friends in the world,” said Cyrilla.

“Oh, the friendship was not very great after all—they were only people . . . young men . . . who, having plenty of time to spare, got the habit of being eternally in her house, blowing the flute, scraping the violin, or driving about with her—just like Polyak, you know. Now, when the General as widower and she as widow again became betrothed, he informed her in one of their *tête-à-têtes*, that, though he had an *aid-de-camp*, he should consider such an appendage quite unnecessary for his wife . . . but . . .” said Rupert stopping suddenly, “perhaps I ought not to tell you all this . . . it’s very improper conversation . . . eh?”

“Oh, not at all,” said Cyrilla, laughing, “only family affairs which I ought to know: pray, go on.”

“Well, he plainly insisted on a cessation of all such demisemimental connections at once and for ever; said that he had no fancy for blowing out his own brains or those of any one else, and such would inevitably be the consequence of a persistence in the line of conduct which she had observed during her first marriage! It was strong language to use towards a middle-aged woman who was about to settle half of her very large fortune upon him; but I think he acted honourably, though many people, and among them his son, thought him a great fool. I am told that this their second encounter, in all the strength of riper years was terrific—they separated, vowing never to speak again: but

the cause of quarrel became known; my aunt received one or two disagreeable anonymous letters, could not avoid meeting the General wherever she went, and at last emigrated to Salzburg."

"Quite a history," said Cyrilla, thoughtfully, "but," she added, looking up with a smile, "but suppose now she were to marry Count Polyak, how odd it would be to have such a little young uncle!"

"Not the least idea of any such thing on either side," answered Rupert. "When the regiment leaves, Polyak will give her some handsome present as *souvenir*, (she never gives anything,) and then she will look out for his successor, and so it will go on until she is quite old, when she will either become outrageously pious, or an inveterate card-player."

"A card-player, I fear," said Cyrilla; "for dear mamma was often obliged to play with her for hours last winter; and sometimes Fernanda, even when dressed for a ball, has been forced to play picquet until the carriage came to the door."

Melanie at this moment entered the room, and Rupert exclaimed, "Well, I hope you have arranged everything with the President, and I may expect you all to-morrow at Freilands?"

"Yes; Wilhelm did not make a single objection—likes the plan of all things—but poor dear Edouard . . ."

"And what prevents 'poor dear Edouard' from going also?" asked Rupert, laughing; "he can drive into and out of Exfort every day with Falkenstein, and if he prefer riding, he can have a horse."

"Such a one perhaps as you lent me, when I was last in Berlin!" said Zorndorff, who was now standing at the door with the President.

Rupert coloured and laughed.

"What do you mean?" asked Melanie.

"He offered me the choice of all his horses, and when I went to his stables, not one of any description was there, they had all been borrowed or taken off by his friends. On my observing that I should be glad to have a phaeton,

droschka, or whatever might be forthcoming, one of the grooms informed me that the head coachman had just driven out with the only pair of carriage horses left."

"I promise that nothing of that kind shall happen while you are at Freilands," said Rupert.

"Nevertheless, I must refuse your invitation."

"But you will honour my *déjeuné* with your presence next week, I hope," said Rupert, carelessly, Zorndorff's refusal apparently making much less impression on him than on the others.

"What day is it to be?"

"Ask Melanie or Cyrilla. I intend to give them *carte blanche* to make Freilands as gay as it can be made, for the next six weeks. We shall begin with a *déjeuné*, because some of my fair friends in Exfort choose to say that I promised to give one as soon as I should enter into possession; and, indeed, I don't know what we could do better."

"Nothing," said Cyrilla, "excepting, perhaps, getting up a comedy, or an opera, or . . ."

"Delightful!" cried Rupert eagerly; "there is a large space on the top of the house, which seems as if it had been intended for a theatre. And now, Melanie," he added, as they went to dinner, "if you can arrange some tableaux, and discover a haunted room at Freilands, I really think we shall be able to give the inhabitants of Exfort something to talk about."





CHAPTER XII.

FREILANDS was deficient in all the interest attached to an old, but abounded in all the comforts expected from a new place. The first building, a hunting-lodge, had been turned into offices, when, after a few visits, the proprietor had discovered that the park possessed beauties which rendered it worthy of being the site of a handsome residence. Not alone was it enlivened and irrigated by a not quite inconsiderable river, but a lake of very fair proportions, and trees of every possible size and description, had been by him so judiciously brought to view, that no one in Exfort had thought of disputing the propriety of denominating the grounds about the house, "English gardens."

The building itself had a noble hall, a magnificent staircase, high spacious rooms, large windows, and a long wide stone balcony, which formed a roof to the portico under which the principal entrance had been made. The furniture was the handsomest that the best upholsterer in Berlin could furnish, and was rich, comfortable, and perfectly modern. Rupert had reserved but one room for himself, which he justly thought he could arrange better than any one else; it was his own private sitting-room, the walls of which he purposed covering with a perfect and valuable collection of the newest arms of all descriptions, from the most diminutive pistol to the longest rifle, the lightest dagger to the most ponderous sword. The apartment he happened to choose was at the very end of the reception

rooms, and particularly cheerful, from having both a south and west aspect; but when he returned home from his cousins on the evening just recorded, to his infinite dismay he discovered in this very room a large glass, extending from the ceiling to the floor, just opposite the doorway, and occupying the place intended for his muskets and carabines.

All protestations were vain; such a glass was necessary to extend the vista—the end room at the other side was also furnished with one. It must be so.

“Then,” said Rupert, “you may furnish this room altogether like the other end room, and I shall take the one adjoining it; but it is hard enough that I may not have the room I like best in my own house.”

“In fact,” said the upholsterer, evidently pleased at the concession, although so unwillingly made, “in fact, the room belongs to the suite, and ought never to have been, allow me to say so, disfigured with guns and swords. If they had been pictures, indeed . . .”

“No pictures,” cried Rupert impatiently; “I am tired of pictures, and wish this house to be as light and cheerful as possible—glasses and candelabra as many as you please, but no pictures.”

“But,” asked the man, a little alarmed, “but you have no objection to the frescoes in the ball-room, I hope? The dancing figures are so appropriate, that I left them as I found them, and . . .”

“O, I have no objection to dancing figures,” said Rupert good-humouredly, “or to the Cupids either, who seem to be playing at hide and seek among the wreaths of impossible flowers that adorn the orchestra gallery.”

The upholsterer bowed—he did not feel quite sure of the sincerity of the praise bestowed, but he consoled himself with the idea that a little irritation was natural on the part of his employer, when he had been almost compelled to resign a room to which he had evidently taken a fancy. As Rupert whistled for his dogs and walked off towards the lake, the workmen were summoned, and, late as it was, all the furniture, guns, pistols, and swords inclusive, removed into the adjoining room, arranged according to a sketch

found on the writing-table, and the rose-coloured furniture which had that day arrived from Berlin substituted. When Rupert returned, they were still hammering at the curtains, and the sound induced him to look into the room. After a short survey, he seemed more than contented with the change, and smiled with inward satisfaction as he thought, "I shall tell Melanie, that I expect her to consider this room as especially hers, on account of the colour of the furniture, and then I can manage like the President, and open and shut my door according as I feel disposed for company or—solitude."

The next day his relations arrived, but Rupert did *not* manage like the President, for he never felt at all disposed for solitude: the door of his armoury, as Cyrilla directly named his room, was never closed, and he began very soon to discover that fair hair and delicate features looked quite as well as their contraries, when seen in the light reflected from rose-coloured silk. How far the principle of opposition to the "dreadful woman," (namely his aunt,) might have enabled him to resist these allurements, it is hard to say; but he was not proof against the fascination of Cyrilla's voice and highly cultivated talent for music. He was himself an excellent musician, and his well exercised tenor harmonized naturally and easily with her high soprano: charmed with her, and perhaps not a little pleased with himself, he induced her every evening to sing with him, apologizing to her, and even in some degree to himself, for the hours spent in the music-room, by whispering, "We must do something to amuse the President, or he may get tired of Freilands."

One evening before the lighted lamps had drawn them together, while Melanie was sitting in the large balcony, which it has been said formed the roof of the portico, pensively gazing on the rising moon, the President standing at a window endeavouring to catch the last rays of departing daylight on a book over which he resolutely bent, Rupert called Cyrilla into the music-room, and begged her to sing for him—for him alone. "There is nothing so de—licious as music in this twilight hour," he added; "and I think I

feel rather disposed for something sentimental or melancholy, just at present."

Cyrilla's light fingers modulated through several keys, before she felt herself sufficiently melancholy to sing "Theckla's Song" of despairing love. Rupert had walked to the other end of the room when she began: he soon again approached her, for, to suit the words, which she pronounced with extraordinary distinctness, her voice became softer and softer, and he drew nearer and nearer, until he reached a chair close to hers. She ceased almost whisperingly, and remained silent, her hands falling listlessly together. Like most people who sing with feeling, she was moved, "even with the sound herself had made."

"Thank you," he said absently, and then, after a pause, added, "If you were other than my light-hearted cousin Cyrilla, I should feel convinced that nothing but a personal appropriation of those words of Schiller's could enable you to sing them with such expression—such passion."

"I fancied myself in the place of Theckla while I was singing."

"And you felt . . ." began Rupert.

"I felt for the moment all her painful uncertainty, her hopes, her fears. I even tried to imagine her love for Max Piccolomini, that most perfect personification of truth and honour; but now," she said gaily, "now I feel nothing of all this; I only perceive that I am in a very dark room with my cousin Rupert, whose resemblance to Piccolomini I have yet to learn."

"I hope that in truth and honour I may never be found deficient," said Rupert; "and as your imagination seems to be strong, I should like very much to know if you have already formed, not what Melanie would call an *ideal*, but a rational incorporation of these qualities, and as many others as are necessary to make . . ."

"Whose voice is that in the next room?" cried Cyrilla, suddenly rising. "Can it—can it be Count Zorndorff?"

"Very probably," answered Rupert, not quite willingly following her out of the room.

It was Zorndorff—he was leaning against one of the glass

doors opening on the balcony, and speaking to Melanie, who sat outside. As the moonlight fell on his pale features, Cyrilla observed a languor in them and in his own appearance almost denoting illness, and though he must have heard her speaking to Rupert as she entered the room, he did not look up until both stood beside him.

“ I hope,” said Rupert, “ you have got tired of being alone, and that you have come to remain here.”

“ No, oh no,” cried Melanie quickly, “ he must not think of such a thing.”

“ And why ?” asked Rupert, with some surprise. “ Did you not tell me you wished of all things to consult him about our *déjeuner*—that I was too great a blockhead to be able to give you any advice concerning the arrangements ?”

“ Dear Rupert, I certainly did not call you a blockhead,” said Melanie ; “ I only observed that it would not do to leave everything to your housekeeper and *chef de cuisine*.”

“ Well, at all events, to my certain knowledge you wrote Zorndorff a note this morning, telling him our dilemma about the theatre, and asking his advice ; and now that he is here, you will not allow him to remain with us.”

“ I have heard that your theatre cannot be ready even for the projected tableaux,” said Zorndorff, “ and that is—partly—the—the reason why I have walked here this evening. I came to speak to you about a substitute.”

“ You *walked* here !” said Cyrilla ; “ ah, that is the reason you look so fatigued—the day has been unusually sultry.”

Zorndorff glanced for a moment towards Melanie, bent his eyes on the ground, and remained silent.

“ And the substitute ?” asked Rupert.

“ Is of a kind more likely to interest others than you,” answered Zorndorff ; “ a French magnetizer, and a young man who allows himself to be magnetized, have just arrived at Exfort, and would have no objection to . . .”

“ Ah ! that will do famously,” cried Rupert, interrupting him ; “ engage them by all means. How did you happen to hear of them ?”

“ Count Lindesmar gave them a letter to his sister,

Madame de Bellegarde, and she naturally thought that my aunt was the person most likely to be of use to them."

"Pray, Melanie," said Rupert, "write to the Bellegardes, and tell them to bring these magnetic treasures with them to-morrow."

"Madame de Bellegarde's sister arrived to-day from Italy with her husband," observed Zorndorff; "perhaps you would like to have them also."

"What, Virginie?" exclaimed Rupert.

"*Virginie*," said Zorndorff with some emphasis.

"I must send an express to Exfort directly," cried Rupert, ringing the bell; "and," he continued, turning to Melanie, "as the De Rubignys will probably come with the Bellegardes, you may say that we shall send a carriage for these magnetic men."

Melanie went with him into another room to write; Zorndorff joined the President, who just then entered, and walked up and down the large apartment with him in grave discourse; Cyrilla, left alone, turned into the balcony, and, leaning against the balustrades, indulged in a long and earnest reverie. Her youthful face had the unusual expression of deep sadness, and, if the truth must be told, she at that moment felt herself oppressed by "a world of woe and sorrow." She did not attempt to analyze her feelings—it would have been difficult to have done so; for surprise, wounded pride, irritation, and grief, struggled for pre-eminence, until disappointment of the bitterest description took possession of her mind. She had gone to meet Count Zorndorff with a heart beating violently from joyful expectation, and he had scarcely looked at her, scarcely answered her, had been indifferent, cold, almost glacial. She worried herself endeavouring to find out the cause of so unexpected a change of manner until the lamps were lit, when she left the balcony, and, taking a book, seated herself at a distant table, and made the most violent efforts to be deaf to the sound of perambulating feet, and to concentrate her thoughts, through the medium of her eyes, on the pages before her—in vain. The words conveyed no meaning to her mind, and even while she read them, Zorndorff's figure

as he had listlessly leaned against the glass door was ever officiously presenting itself. Slowly she laid down the volume, and reluctantly drew a piece of work towards her; for her fingers having been chiefly employed in acquiring mechanical dexterity on the keys of a pianoforte, and in the nice management of a pencil or paint-brush, she was but an indifferent embroiderer; nevertheless, like all her female acquaintance, she had an astonishing piece of work in progress, and, on the present occasion at least, had reason to agree with Bacon in thinking it pleasant to have "a lively work upon a lightsome ground."

Perhaps the only time when a woman can justly rejoice in being a woman, is on an occasion like the foregoing. In moments of mental uneasiness, or even mental pain, the alleviation given by a needle is indescribable: it seems to possess a sort of magnetic power in drawing the cares from the brain to itself; and even when its motions are uselessly employed, the mere effort to direct it generally distracts the mind or occupies the thoughts so effectually, that it produces in very expert and very indifferent workwomen precisely the same result. The flower over which Cyrilla now bent her graceful head assumed a most fanciful form. It may have been oriental, and have possessed a mysterious meaning—in the German flora it could not be found; and Rupert, on his return, as he leaned over her chair, compared it without circumlocution to the wonderful flowers on the ball-room gallery.

"I believe you are right," said Cyrilla, smiling, as she held it at a little distance; "I have, as usual, made some stupid mistake in counting the stitches. I wish I could work like Adrienne de Bellegarde, or Julia de Lindesmar."

"Have they become particular friends of yours?" demanded Rupert.

"Not exactly—but they are the gayest people in Exfort; and everybody knows, or wishes to know them. They are rather free, or French, as they call it, in their manners."

After a pause, Rupert observed, "Madame de Bellegarde's sister has arrived from Italy, and will probably be here to-morrow"

“The Vicomtesse de Rubigny, is it not?” asked Cyrilla, beginning to pick out the petals of her fancy flower.

“Yes.”

“I am rather curious to see her,” she continued, “for she must strangely resemble me in voice and manner.”

“In voice extremely,” said Rupert, a little embarrassed, “in manner not at all; it is only a harebrained fellow such as I am who could for a moment have mistaken one for the other—the room was dark, and I was at the time in daily expectation of seeing her.”

“Were you?” said Cyrilla, leaning back in her chair, and looking up at him; “she is handsome, I suppose?”

“N—o, I believe not.”

“Not plain, surely?”

“Oh no!”

“Well, what is she then?”

“Interesting-looking.”

“And is she amusing, talkative like her sisters?”

“She is not—talkative.”

“Nor you either, this evening,” said Cyrilla, rising just in time to hear Zorndorff say to Melanie:—

“I should like to see the whole house; you know I have a great fancy for furniture and everything of that kind. I know a great deal more about the castle at Windhorst than Adlerkron does.”

“That’s quite true,” said Rupert. “Fancy his counting the windows there one fine morning, and telling me I did not deserve to possess such a place, because I did not know how many openings had been made in the walls to admit the light of day.”

“I recommend his waiting for the light of day to inspect Freilands,” observed the President, “and think, if he mean to return home to-night, the sooner he sets out on his walk the better.”

“I can look at the house,” said Zorndorff, “and drink tea with you too before I leave, as there is moonlight. Come, aunt Melanie, you must be my cicerone.”

“You will not require much time,” said Rupert, “for the hall, staircase, these rooms, and the ball-room, are

alone worth looking at—the wings have only a ground floor; one belongs to the President and my cousins, the other, with the breakfast and dining-room, is intended for visitors. You will find a room ready for you if you choose to occupy it.”

“Not just to-night—but perhaps”

“Come,” said Melanie, “you shall first see Rupert’s rooms, as they are a continuation of these.”

“Don’t forget to show him the beautifully inlaid pistols,” said Cyrilla, as they were leaving the room.

Zorndorff stopped for a moment, and observed, “I suppose Adlerkron has been performing some of his extraordinary feats with a pistol for you. A man’s life would not be worth much who was to meet him in a duel.”

“I don’t know that,” said Rupert, pushing a chair towards Cyrilla; “shooting at a mark and firing at a man are very different things.”

“Do you shoot so very well?” asked Cyrilla, turning to him.

“Yes, but we are not going to talk of that now—I want to tell you about the pony-carriage that will be here the day after to-morrow.”

“Oh how good-natured of you, in the midst of all your arrangements here, to remember that I said I should like to have a pony-carriage.”

“I remembered that you said you should like to learn to drive, and and I like very much the idea of teaching you. Are you courageous?”

“Not very; I rather hope the ponies may be very quiet.”

He believed—he was almost sure they were steady—she would like the drives in the wood when the weather was warm, but some morning early she must go to the moor, the most interesting though worthless part of Freilands, but he had extensive plans for the improvement of it—he would show her a map and explain how in twenty or thirty years the whole marsh could be made arable land.

The President looked over his book, raised his eyebrows, and drew his mouth into a more significant than becoming grimace, while the cousins pored over the map together,

their blonde curling hair so exactly the same colour, that at a little distance the two heads appeared like one.

Nearly an hour elapsed before Melanie returned; when she did so, she was alone. "Edouard," she said, "had thought it better to return home before midnight."

"Unsociable fellow," exclaimed Rupert, "there is no use in trying to be intimate or friendly with him; he repulses all advances, though he has told me more than a dozen times that our fates are mysteriously linked together, and that we can never long remain asunder."

"Did he? Where did he hear that?" asked Melanie, with an appearance of the deepest interest.

"A few years ago, he discovered some wonderful man—an astrologer—who drew a scheme of his horoscope. He wanted to have mine too, but I refused to tell him any particulars concerning the day and hour of my birth. I heard afterwards he took the trouble to make the necessary inquiries of my uncle."

"And you never questioned him?"

"Never."

"Do you mean to say," asked Cyrilla, "that you did not feel any curiosity?"

"No, I don't mean to say that; but I am more than inclined to doubt the power of any one to augur or predict from the conjunction of stars at the hour of birth; and I am quite convinced that the knowledge of our future in this world is denied us for a good purpose, and is certainly conducive to our happiness."

"But," hesitated Melanie, "but you don't think it—absolutely—irreligious, having one's horoscope . . ."

"He has told you plainly," said the President, looking up suddenly, "that he considers it useless and—foolish; and he is right, for tampering with one's happiness is folly."

Melanie shrank, as she always did from the probably unintentional harshness of the President, and became silent; the subject was one that Rupert disliked; Cyrilla was indifferent and pre-occupied; and the conversation continued very desultory until the party separated for the night.

Cyrilla was still sitting at an open window in her room, when she heard a gentle knock at the door, and immediately after Melanie stood before her in a long white robe, with a taper in her hand.

"Enter, Lady Macbeth!" said Cyrilla, smiling faintly, while she turned towards her without moving from the low chair near the window where she had been sitting motionless for more than half-an-hour. "Are you walking in your sleep? or has the President got an express from Exfort?"

"Neither," answered Melanie. "The fact is, Cyrilla," she continued, extinguishing her taper and then walking uneasily up and down the room, "the fact is, I must speak to you—must tell you something—must get your assistance . . ."

"If your manner were not so very really serious," said Cyrilla, "I should imagine you were about to disclose some grand secret concerning to-morrow's festivities."

"O, I am not thinking of to-morrow, I can only think of one thing now. Tell me, Cyrilla," she cried, stopping suddenly before her, "you—you don't—no, I know you don't—care at all for Edouard?"

"That would be unpardonable," answered Cyrilla, "after all the trouble you have taken to make me like him."

"But I mean, you don't *particularly* like him?"

"Yes I do. I like talking to him better than to any one I know when I feel disposed to be rational—Rupert is more amusing and cheerful, but . . ."

"Ah!—exactly—that's just the sort of answer I wished for," said Melanie. "Now, dear, only imagine," she continued, drawing a chair close to her sister's, "only imagine—Edouard has had the folly—the madness—after all my good advice and warnings, to—to fall desperately in love with you! Did you ever know anything so distressing?"

"Dreadful!" said Cyrilla, with a smile of such perfect satisfaction, that nothing but her sister's pre-occupation could have prevented her from observing it.

"He came here this evening," continued Melanie, "to tell me that the short separation of ten or twelve days had

convinced him that he could only live in your presence, that all his ambitious projects had become worthless in his eyes, that he heard your voice in every breeze, saw your face in every—every . . .”

“What?” asked Cyrilla, with a gay laugh.

“No matter. I see you are disposed to laugh and be merry as usual. I hope, however, you will have the kindness to aid my endeavours to cure him of his unfortunate passion by showing him your indifference and dislike in the plainest manner.”

“But I neither feel the one nor the other,” said Cyrilla.

“Then you must feign both for *his* good.”

“No, dear, I should rather not,” said Cyrilla, with considerable decision of manner.

“I could almost think our poor Edouard’s sufferings gave you pleasure,” cried Melanie, petulantly; “and, laugh as you will, he has suffered, and greatly too. You must have perceived how ill he looks.”

“He does look ill,” answered Cyrilla, forcing her features into as serious an expression as the exultation of her feelings at the moment would permit, “but I supposed the long hot walk might have . . .”

“No, no, no, no! He wanted at once to see and speak to you. Fortunately, you were in the music-room with Rupert, and he decided on consulting me. I confess I could not restrain some tears of sympathy, for I know too well what it is to sacrifice love on the altar of necessity!”

“Dear Melanie!” said Cyrilla; and every particle of gaiety forsook her manner as she lightly laid her hand on her sister’s shoulder, and looked into her large black eyes as they filled with the slowly gathering tears of melancholy recollection.

“I listened to all he had to say,” continued Melanie, “and when he talked rationally of devoting himself to his profession, and living contentedly, as others have done and others will do, and added that he had no doubt of rising rapidly in it, and being in time able to satisfy the reasonable wishes of any reasonable woman, I felt strongly inclined to say, ‘You are right, Edouard. If happiness be attainable

in this world, it is only to be found in the society of a being with whom we feel congeniality of mind . . .”

“ And,” whispered Cyrilla, bending down her head that her sister might not see the smile which again played round her mouth, “ and a mysterious combination of spirits !”

“ Yes,” said Melanie, by no means unconscious of her sister’s irony. “ Yes, so I would have spoken had the object of his affection been other than *you*; but knowing that it was on you that he had bestowed this warmest feeling of his noble heart, I was obliged to answer as you would have done.”

“ Your answer ?” cried Cyrilla quickly, and with an anxiety she made no efforts to conceal.

“ It was prosaic in the extreme. I said that if he talked in that way to you, you would laugh at him !”

“ Did you ?” said Cyrilla, biting her lip and breathing quickly, while she pulled and puckered the trimming of her dressing-gown with great diligence; “ and then . . . ?”

“ And then I told him how carefully and rationally you had been educated, and what pains your mother had taken to prevent your having any romantic ideas on the subject of marriage; and though you might not altogether agree with her, still . . .”

“ Really, Melanie,” cried Cyrilla, with ill-concealed impatience, “ the manner in which you inform everybody that my mother is worldly, and that I am looking for an eligible *parti*, is . . . is most provoking ! I wonder that your own feelings of delicacy do not prevent you from talking in this manner of your nearest relations !”

“ Edouard is also a relation, and I do not think I have any right, from a mistaken notion of delicacy, to endanger his peace of mind or future happiness.”

“ And is my peace of mind and future happiness not worth taking into consideration ?” asked Cyrilla, reproachfully.

“ I know that neither is in danger, for even supposing that you liked Edouard, the fear of poverty would soon stifle the imprudent affection.”

“ You forget that I have never known anything but poverty since I was born,” observed Cyrilla.

“ Why, yes, but it was a luxurious kind of poverty; for, after all, you always had everything just like other people.”

“ True,” answered Cyrilla, “ but my father was constantly in debt, and I should have preferred feeling absolute want to hearing of bills unpaid, and seeing my mother wasting away from care and anxiety.”

“ Edouard never had . . . never will have a debt,” said Melanie; “ he is too proud to endure anything of that kind. He may wish for riches—be discontented if he do not possess them, but he will undoubtedly live within whatever income he may have.”

“ In that case,” said Cyrilla, “ he can, as he said himself, ‘ satisfy the reasonable desires of any reasonable woman; ’ and I hope, dear Melanie, considering the care with which you seem to think I have been educated, you will allow me to take it for granted that I am . . . a reasonable woman ?”

“ You ?”

“ Yes; the surprise you exhibit is not very flattering, but still . . . ”

“ I don’t quite understand,” cried Melanie, in some alarm. “ You don’t mean to say that you would think of marrying Edouard ?”

“ Suppose,” said Cyrilla, with a slight laugh; “ suppose I had discovered the congeniality of mind of which you have so often spoken, and the . . . the . . . ” She stopped in a state of embarrassment, and blushing with an intense-ness very unusual to her.

“ Good heavens !” exclaimed Melanie, “ you surely do not mean to say that you love him ?”

“ I don’t mean to *say* anything,” answered Cyrilla, covering her face with her hands and bending down her head; “ but I believe I *feel* more than I need tell you or any one else.”

Melanie rose, and again walked up and down the room. “ Cyrilla, this will never do,” she exclaimed at length.

“Never—never—never. All your relations will raise objections. Your aunt will never consent to your union with Edouard—she quarrelled with his father, and . . .”

“O, I know all about that,” said Cyrilla, “and have not the least intention of ever asking her consent.”

“But you forget, dear girl, that she is the only person who could, in any way, be of use to you on such an occasion.”

“She will never be of use to me, or to any one else,” rejoined Cyrilla.

“And then, Wilhelm—he would be outrageous,—would not listen to Edouard for a moment.”

“I imagine Count Zorndorff is not likely to consult the President,” said Cyrilla; “he is of an age to judge for himself; and having commenced his bureaucratic career, is independent—even in his poverty.”

“I have nothing more to say,” almost whispered Melanie. “If you indeed love as I once did . . .”

“A little more, I suspect,” said Cyrilla, quickly; “for no Count Falkenstein,—no one on earth,—could induce *me* to sacrifice my love on the altar of necessity.”

“What a disagreeable habit you and Rupert have of remembering and repeating my words,” said Melanie, with some irritation.

“You ought to be flattered at our doing so; it is a proof that they are uncommon, and worth recollecting.”

“Cyrilla, I have but one thing more to say. Do not let Wilhelm know or even suspect any engagement with Edouard, should you enter into one.”

“My dear Melanie, you have said so much to Count Zorndorff about my rational education,—have presented him such a disagreeable picture of a heartless worldly girl, that I think it more than probable he will let the matter rest for ever. I have read and heard of men who have required less to induce them to resign women better and wiser than I am.”

“O, I have only to give him the slightest hint,” began Melanie.

“Never,” cried Cyrilla, springing from her chair with a

vehemence in strong contrast to her usual gentle movements; "never, to him or to any one, hint or in any way refer to what has passed between us this night. Nothing would have tempted me to speak to you as I have done, had it not been absolutely necessary to disabuse your mind of the erroneous idea you have formed of my character and sentiments."

"I wish," said Melanie, "I had known this sooner."

"Perhaps it is all for the best," replied Cyrilla. "Count Zorndorff can undoubtedly marry more advantageously; and yet I cannot tell you," she added, snatching her handkerchief from the toilet-table, and hastily drawing it across her eyes, "I cannot tell you how foolishly rejoiced I feel at what I have just heard from you."

"Who . . ." exclaimed Melanie, clasping her hands, "who would have suspected this, after hearing you laugh and jest on all such subjects with Rupert!"

"And do you imagine that we have no feeling, because we do not talk sentimentally? Believe me, Melanie, people often laugh at and pretend incredulity in love, just as they do about ghost stories; all the while believing and fearing in spite of themselves."

"O no, Cyrilla; if you had had my experience, you would think differently. A woman perhaps may speak in that way to conceal feelings that education forbids her to exhibit; but, believe me, a man's jest on such a subject is bitter earnest. Well have the ancients represented Love as a child—it ought to be treated as such—tenderly—considerately, not laughed at—irritated—browbeaten!"

"I'm sure I never meant to do anything of the kind," said Cyrilla, with a demure smile.

"But others have," said Melanie, looking upwards; "and never can I forget the evening at the Bellegardes, when Edouard talked so charmingly on this very subject. We were speaking of German legends; and you may remember how he said that they could be traced to the German mythology, and how that had been mixed up with the Roman, as the Roman with the Grecian, but that all the fables of all mythologies contained very good systems of

morals, if people would only take the trouble of studying them. He gave several examples, which were both ingenious and amusing; and, among other things, said that Cupid had been represented as a child, and generally a young child, in order to point out what patience we should have with his perverseness, violence, or instability."

"Yes," said Cyrilla; "I remember also Adrienne de Bellegarde getting into a sort of ecstasy, and saying that Count Zorndorff deserved to be kissed for his dear funny thoughts . . . I think, too, he requested her to kiss him if she felt the slightest inclination . . ."

"Yes, I believe we laughed at her a good deal," said Melanie, "and said *that* was the only one of his thoughts she had been able to understand; but you are sleepy, and to-morrow will be a fatiguing day for us."

"Not for me," said Cyrilla, "as I have only to amuse myself. I wish it were come . . ."

"And how much has the desire to see Edouard again to do with your wish?"

"More than I should like to tell you, or even to confess to myself," answered Cyrilla, sighing; "and now, good night."





CHAPTER XIII.

RUPERT'S invitations to his *déjeuner-dîner* had been so very general and comprehensive, and the anxiety of the inhabitants of Exfort so great to take advantage of such an opportunity of inspecting the improvements and new furniture at Freilands, that a large proportion of the company began to arrive with what Melanie called unconscionable exactitude, that is, before she was ready to receive them; but in the meantime there were gardens to look at, and shady walks to wander in, and bands of music and tents, and when they had walked about, and looked at everything and everybody, they began quietly and at first imperceptibly to separate into classes. The *crème de la crème*, who considered themselves Melanie's intimate friends, unhesitatingly entered the house, took possession of the large balcony, and, secure from the sun's rays under the awning, leisurely inspected, through their single and double lorgnettes, the remaining and larger portion of the company, as they walked in groups under the trees,—they being, if we may continue to pursue the meaning of this truly German and pastoral metaphor, the milk, which had subsided, and let its lighter part, the cream, rise. Now, in the town of Exfort, as in all other towns, there was a quantity of adulterated cream, whether composed by a mixture of noxious or innoxious ingredients none but a chemist, or a very nice observer, could tell; but a good deal of this description of cream, viz. a considerable number of very

well dressed and exceedingly discontented men and women now began to spread themselves before the house, equally afraid of the reception which they might receive were they to venture to mount the stairs, and of the loss of *caste* which would inevitably ensue should they enjoy themselves unrestrainedly with the others where they were. Rupert, who could not, or would not, understand any of these distinctions, appeared among them, and immediately proposed their entering. They looked at the balcony, then at each other, and stood irresolute, until Cyrilla, who better understood the state of the case, added, "Perhaps you would like to look at my cousin's collection of arms and pipes. I assure you," she continued, as they all began to pour into the hall, "I assure you the pipes are worth looking at,—I believe the most of them are souvenirs; there are meerschauts in every possible form, and carved wood, and some of china, with such beautiful paintings on them, that if they did not smell of tobacco, I should have stolen them long ago."

While the now gay and satisfied guests wandered through the rooms, Cyrilla saw from one of the windows the President's carriage drive under the portico. While still considering whether or not his nephew had arrived with him, Zorndorff passed quickly through the room, overseeing her in the crowd of ignoble persons by whom she was surrounded, and entered the balcony, where he was received with a sort of acclamation by the Bellegardes and their companions. She had not thought of how she should receive him—had merely been conscious of an undefined feeling of anxiety, and a sort of curiosity to know how he would act. The apparent continuation of his conduct of the evening before was irritating enough, but her conversation with Melanie had removed all doubts from her mind, and she turned away, merely resolving to leave him in vain expectation of her appearance on the balcony or in the adjacent rooms for a longer time than he might perhaps desire.

Rupert's laudable endeavours to banish ceremony, by allowing every one to choose their own place at the nume-

rous and perfectly similar tables, had been tolerably successful. Pleasure and expectation lighted every countenance; and the party round each consisted generally of friends or acquaintances who had sought each other, and were more than usually united by a common feeling of hunger. Rupert took possession of a place beside Cyrilla, which she had unreservedly said belonged to him.

“What would I not give for your light heart, Adlerkron!” said Zorndorff, as he was passing to the place *vis à vis*. “No sooner have you lost one object of interest than you find another;” and he glanced significantly from Cyrilla to the Vicomtesse de Rubigny, who was sitting at the same table, while he spoke.

“I don’t understand you,” said Rupert, carelessly, and then continued his conversation with Cyrilla, as unconscious as she was conscious that Zorndorff’s eyes were fixed on them both with an expression of such anxious interest that even Melanie, who was not usually very observant, remarked it; and, fearing others might do the same, tried to engage his attention.

“Edouard, have you heard what Professor Huber has been saying?”

“N—o; not exactly, I believe.”

“I am so sorry, as it was just what you wanted to know about magnetic manipulation.”

“Ah . . . indeed!”

“And then he has visited Justinus Kerner.”

“I was at Weinsberg just after the Countess Falkenstein left,” said the Professor; “but I dare not tell you,” he added blandly, again turning to Melanie, “I dare not tell you all that that most amiable of poets and men said of the charming and talented acquaintance he had just made.”

“I spent several most happy days in the neighbourhood of Weinsberg,” said Melanie; “Kerner surpassed all my expectations. There is an abyss of poetry and fervour in his dark eyes. He is a phenomenon that we must endeavour to retain in all its pure originality, for the world is becoming every day more and more prosaic and philosophical. The time may come when the existence of such a

man may be doubted . . . he is already incomprehensible to many."

"Do tell me something about this Kerner," said Cyrilla in a low voice to Rupert; "who is he?"

"A man who has written a good deal about the sayings and doings of ghosts and goblins, and about sausages being poisonous . . . and people won't believe him."

"Nonsense, Rupert! . . . I really wish to know something of him; Melanie has talked of nothing else all day."

"Of course not, as her head is full of magnetism and the magnetizer. The fact is, this Justinus Kerner is, I believe, a very amiable man, a physician, and a poet; also the author of a work called 'The Somnambulist of Prevorst,' in which he describes the visions of a—a—a thoroughbred somnambulist. He has besides written some very . . . what shall I call them?—genuine lyrical poems."

"You may well say so!" cried the Professor, enthusiastically; "they are perfect, full of feeling, beautiful! Pain and pleasure flow like turbulent and gentle streams through the lines; the ideas are striking, and in the expression of melancholy he is inimitable!"

"But," whispered Cyrilla, "is this poet the same man who believes in ghosts?"

"Yes, and they (I mean the ghosts) will make him immortal, I suspect. His 'Somnambulist' may not be read, his poems may be forgotten, but that a man of learning and genius should, in the face of the world, declare himself the champion of the very commonest and most popular description of ghosts and apparitions, is such an anomaly as must ensure him fame; and he deserves it, too, if it were only for his moral courage."

"O, how you would admire him, did you but know him!" cried Melanie.

"Very likely," answered Rupert, "as a humane and excellent man, and an agreeable poet and companion; but he would never make me believe in gray shadowy figures, with burning eyes, and all that sort of thing. However, this is scarcely a fit place to discuss such subjects. With champagne in our glasses, and *pâté de foie gras* on our plates, who can think of ghosts?"

"For my part," said Cyrilla, "I greatly prefer discussing and thinking of them in a crowded room, and with champagne in my glass, to any other place or in any other way."

"You are not afraid in the dark, like Melanie, are you?"

"No; but I don't like hearing odd noises and rustlings in my room at night."

"Perhaps she is *sensitive*," cried Melanie, eagerly.

"Oh," said Cyrilla, colouring a good deal, "don't imagine that I believe my dead friends or acquaintances can appear to me! Do you?"

"I believe they can," answered Melanie, solemnly, "if I were capable of seeing them."

"But," said Rupert, "it is not even necessary to be a friend or acquaintance; dead strangers appear sometimes, requesting commiseration for their unhappy state, or for the purpose of relating some interesting family history . . . or murder . . . ghosts are the greatest gossips imaginable!"

"And you really and truly believe this!" said Cyrilla, turning to her sister.

"I believe that those persons who die without having been very wicked, but yet having so little religious feeling that they are not fit for heaven, are in a certain degree still bound to the earth. I think their spirits float in the air around us until they are prepared for a better world."

"Some must float a confoundedly long time, I suspect," murmured Rupert; but even while he spoke, he looked merrily towards Melanie, raised his champagne glass, and slightly bowed.

"A most disagreeable idea," said Cyrilla; "I now don't wonder at her being afraid to remain in a room alone."

"The belief in the apparitions of living friends is much more agreeable," observed Rupert.

"But do not such apparitions denote that the person who appears will soon be numbered among the dead?" asked Cyrilla.

"Not necessarily: that idea has rather gone out of

fashion, and the newest discoveries have proved these apparitions to be emanations from the nerves. They are now known by the name of nervous spirits: ask Melanie."

But Melanie was talking earnestly in a low voice to Zorndorff, and did not hear the appeal.

"O Rupert, I think you are inventing," cried Cyrilla.

"Not in the least, I assure you. For instance, suppose I feel an earnest desire, a desperate longing to see you, my nervous spirit, or the spirit of my nerves, releases itself from my long legs and body, and I appear to you as a gray shadow, or even with the colours of life, according to your capability for discerning apparitions: my appearance under such circumstances does not make it necessary that I should die the first convenient opportunity afterwards; but I believe I must be ill, or in a delicate state of health, or no you must be ill, or nervous, or something of that kind, in order to be able to see me. Let us ask Melanie; she will be delighted to explain, if we have time and patience to listen to the exordium."

Melanie was once more appealed to; and though at first unwilling to speak, a few judicious questions from Rupert, asked in a serious information-seeking manner, joined to the entreaties of the Bellegardes, at length prevailed, and lowering her voice that it might not reach her husband's ears, she began: "There was a time when I also thought a disbelief of ghosts, or a disavowal of any belief I might occasionally feel, a matter of necessity—a proof of a certain degree of cultivation of mind I am not ashamed to acknowledge that that time is past, that I have grown humbler, and am now ready to believe things to be probable and possible which were formerly to me as well as to others unceasing subjects of ridicule."

"*Charmante, charmante, comme elle parle!*" exclaimed the Vicomte de Rubigny, really charmed with her animated countenance, but totally unable to follow in German the sense of what she was saying.

"How often," continued Melanie, "have occurrences which appeared incredible proved in the end natural phenomena!"

“O, we are quite ready to believe anything of that kind,” said Rupert; “tell us something about the apparitions of living people.”

“You must agree with me in some other things first,” said Melanie, smiling. “Allow that there are few human beings who have not, in the course of their lives, had a prophetic dream, a warning, or at least made use of some sympathetic remedy, which is equivalent to an acknowledgment of a belief in its efficacy.”

“But such things have nothing to do with apparitions,” said Rupert.

“I think they have: these dreams, warnings, remedies, come under the denomination of popular superstitions, which you accuse Kerner of reviving.”

“You never can forgive my having said that Kerner’s spectres were bad style . . . decidedly vulgar!”

“Kerner has not invented,” rejoined Melanie, “he has related simply what he heard. No one doubts that he could have easily made a more interesting and poetical narrative of his ‘Somnambulist,’ had he been so disposed; but he preferred conscientiously writing down her very words, and as she could have no motive for deceiving him, why should we not believe her visions, when there is nothing in them that may not be reconciled with the most sublime conceptions that religion can form of a world of spirits, for instance that dark state of those wandering ghosts . . .”

“Never mind *them*, dear Melanie,” said Rupert, “but come to the apparitions—the emanations from our nerves that waft our presence, as you so beautifully express it, like the perfume of a flower, to those at a distance from us . . . all the while we . . . and the flowers yielding our emanations without diminution of size or colour.”

“I knew you intended to laugh at me . . .” began Melanie; but at that moment a carriage drove rapidly past the open windows; and on her recognising it as one of Rupert’s she whispered: “It is the magnetizer; I believe I ought to go to him.”

“That would be very kind of you,” said Rupert; “and,” he added, detaining her a moment as she passed him, “if

you want my assistance for any of the wonders to be performed, I promise not to betray you for six whole weeks."

"Incorrigible unbeliever!" she answered, laughing. "If there were any juggling in the business, you would be sure to make a blunder to procure a laugh; but there is none. Edouard says they require nothing but an arm-chair, a table, and cards."

"Still I think I might make myself useful in giving hints or winks in a quiet sort of way. I assure you I am not such a donkey as you suppose."

"Just don't you concern yourself at all about this matter," said Melanie, "but follow me with these people as soon as they have done eating ices and bon-bons."

Although a belief in animal magnetism¹ was scarcely more prevalent in Germany than in England at that time, and notwithstanding the determined distrust with which people generally spoke of appearances not to be satisfactorily explained by any effort of the five senses, the natural tendency of the German mind to indulge in close and subtle meditation, and to seize any subject likely to procure a field for sophistical disquisitions, made the appearance of the magnetizer be hailed almost with acclamation; at least a noise beyond the sound of murmuring voices was heard, as the intelligence of his arrival spread from table to table, and room to room. The words magnetism, mesmerism, magnetic sleep, visions, &c., &c., which became more and more audible, were uttered in every variety of tone, and with a sort of enthusiasm by most of the female part of the company; for women are naturally inclined towards all that is mysterious and wonderful, and more prone to what gives free scope to conjecture than to what incites to investigation. It would have been difficult to have satisfied the expectations of the assembly; but "after

¹ The reader curious on such subjects is requested to bear in mind that the words "Animal Magnetism," &c. &c., had not yet been pronounced incorrect by Reichenbach, nor had the new force called *Odyle* been discovered by him. We may, it is to be hoped, continue to use the words familiar to every one, until others equally comprehensible or incomprehensible have been substituted.

all," as Rupert observed to Cyrilla, "it is of no importance, provided they can amuse themselves until the ball-room be lighted."

The *Salon* became by degrees full—we must say by degrees, for Melanie's friends, the *crème de la crème*, taking advantage of their intimacy, retired to her rooms to change their morning costumes for the lightest and freshest ball dresses imaginable, thereby, as they intended, effectually distinguishing themselves from the rest of the company for the remainder of the evening. It is astonishing how much displeasure and annoyance this little stratagem caused, or how much it added to the unpopularity of the perpetrators of it. Among themselves much more unreserved and quite as good-natured and affectionate as other people, they appeared to those who did not belong to their coterie, haughty, arrogant, heartless, and determined not to have anything in common with the rest of the society, of whom the younger female part suddenly found their crape or chip bonnets intolerably heavy and warm, and an emigration to one of the remote apartments commenced, where several fantastic pyramids of them were hastily erected on the sofas and chairs. Mothers and chaperones, after a few dissatisfied whispers, resigned themselves to the comforts of the broad elastic causeuses or divans, and nodded their heads and plumed bonnets with persevering dignity.

One group of men surrounded Zorndorff, another the President, and the different opinions for and against the belief in mesmeric sleep were attacked and defended with wit and acuteness; the result apparently being that the incredulous understanding remained in most cases deaf to all the offered metaphysical or mystical suggestions, and seemed determined to yield to nothing but palpable or ocular demonstration.

At length Melanie appeared—dignified, but evidently in a state bordering on beatitude. She was followed by the somnambulist, a very young, slight, pale, and gentleman-like man. He spoke a few words to the magnetizer, then seated himself in the chair placed for him in the middle of the room, and the business immediately com-

menced. In a few minutes he began to turn and twist himself uneasily, moved his arms, stretched out his legs, turned up his eyes until the white alone was visible, then rolled them lustreless around, and finally closed them altogether: his body became quieter, and at length his head found a resting-place against the well stuffed side of the chair. The magnetizer now commenced a series of movements as if he were throwing something at him, and by means of these and the assistance of a good deal of friction the left arm was put into a state of total inflexibility. The company were requested to compare the pulses of the two arms; several persons did so, and declared that that of the left was almost extinct. The operations now commenced on the legs, which were put into a similar state of rigidity, and afforded the persons who chose to make the trial an apparently strong though somewhat elastic seat. The sleeper seemed to suffer extremely during these experiments, and to feel a relief similar to an awakening from night-mare when they ceased.

His eyes were then bound, and cards placed on a table beside him. One partner succeeded the other from the rows of eager spectators, and the game began after the players had, by pressing his hand, given him a sign of sympathy. The cards of the somnambulist lay in a heap, yet he generally chose them judiciously; when he made a mistake, which did not often occur, trembling violently and becoming impatient; but he almost always won, and at last played at a distance, and turned away from his opponent.

After the card-playing came the reading of closed or at least so folded letters that the contents were invisible, and many were read with extraordinary fluency. A few remarks about the peculiarities of the manner of writing and orthography causing much amusement. All this finished expertness, however, failed to convince those predetermined not to believe, and their doubts were strengthened when a few more carefully folded papers seemed to puzzle the unfortunate being who had allowed himself to be exhibited for their amusement.

Almost every one had written something, and wished to

have it read, in order to remove or confirm the doubts which they unreservedly expressed. No one would believe the testimony of another, so great was the fear of being imposed on. To this murmuring multitude were opposed a small and resolute band of enthusiasts, who would not listen to an expression of suspicion or hesitation, and appeared quite overpowered by astonishment and admiration at every well-played card and every line that was correctly deciphered.

At length the company began to crowd round the somnambulist and overwhelm him with questions, the answers to which, like those of the oracles of old, admitted of various interpretations ; but the President, who had at first looked on with rigid attention, now began to exhibit some impatience ; he approached Melanie, and whispered authoritatively, " We have had enough of this trifling, put an end to it as soon as you can ! " then turning to Professor Huber, who was standing near him, he observed, " I have seen these useless performances with cards and letters with a good deal less pleasure than those of an expert juggler. I wish to be surprised by the juggler, and make little or no effort to understand what I see ; here I try to understand, and can do nothing but suspect charlatanry."

" I perceive your Excellency doubts the realities of magnetic relations and magnetic sleep ? "

" I acknowledge myself incapable of giving an opinion," answered the President. " The question embraces physiological and psychological phenomena that deserve investigation ; but I prefer leaving the elucidation to men of science, and totally disapprove of working on the nerves or imagination of partially diseased bodies or minds for the purpose of satisfying frivolous curiosity, or affording temporary amusement."

Rupert, who had during the whole time looked on and listened with an attention that had both surprised and gratified Melanie, now walked towards her and whispered, " Extremely well got up ; I am so much obliged to you ! " As she indignantly prepared to answer him, he moved away, and she was soon surrounded by those who either

agreed with her in opinion, or deemed it necessary to say something civil, learned, or wise, on the occasion.

There were also a select few, who nodded their heads, looked solemn, and came to the conclusion among themselves that the young man's capabilities were not to be compared to those whose magnetic sleep came without the assistance of art.

The sound of music from the ball-room put an end to all the discussions, and the rest of the evening was spent there. Zorndorff, though he scarcely ever danced, took advantage of Rupert's being less at liberty than usual, and immediately engaged Cyrilla. A very few minutes sufficed to renew their intimacy and good understanding. Without any explanation, he became precisely what he had been before she had quitted Exfort; and, perfectly satisfied with her sister's communication, she cared not how long the present state of pleasing perplexity continued.

It was at a late, or rather early hour, that the last carriage, containing the Bellegardes, drove away. The President had retired to rest at his usual time; and as Melanie, Cyrilla, and Rupert passed together through the "banquet-halls deserted," they discovered Zorndorff stretched on one of the stone benches in the balcony, apparently watching the gradual approach of day.

"Handsome fellow!" observed Rupert in a low voice to his cousins; "what a pity it is he cannot or will not enjoy life like other people! Zorndorff," he added, walking towards him, "you will find a better bed below stairs, and I recommend your trying it."

"Thank you," he replied, slowly rising; "I intend to accept your often proffered hospitality for a few days. This house is too gay to be willingly changed for my lonely apartments."

"That is the most sensible speech I have heard you make for a long time," said Rupert. "These *déjeûners* are famous things; I should not have any objection to have one every week!"





CHAPTER XIV.



AM sorry to perceive that Edouard is one of those people who make it a point never to be in time for breakfast," observed the President to Cyrilla one morning as they met at an early hour. "I almost expect he will at last order his coffee to be taken to his room, that he may smoke as he does when at home. If he had been living in my house during his youth, he would never have acquired such habits."

"And yet," said Cyrilla, smiling, "you allow Melanie to breakfast in her room, and she has done so in your house for more than twelve years."

"Twelve years and some months; but let me tell you Cyrilla, if she had begun this habit *eleven* years and some months ago, I should never have permitted it. Twelve years ago, Melanie was very young and very beautiful, and I was neither, but very much in love; and consequently, for the time being, an indulgent, idolizing fool!"

"I cannot imagine you very much in love," said Cyrilla, as her eyes passed from the tall unpliant form, to the pale severe face, of her brother-in-law; "in fact, I cannot fancy you at all in love."

"I am glad to hear it; as, from what I have just said, I may infer that you cannot imagine me a fool. But here comes Rupert; he has been up and out some hours. I do not know which is most to be admired—his active habits, or happy buoyancy of temperament."

“ I did not think that he was at all a person you would admire,” said Cyrilla.

“ And what sort of person *did* you think I should admire ? ”

Cyrilla felt his piercing eyes were upon her. She wished to name Zorndorff, but feared not being able to pronounce his name with sufficient indifference, so she remained silent; and, after waiting in vain for an answer, he continued—

“ Yes, Cyrilla; I admire Rupert almost as much as I do you. I never saw two people more like in person, mind, and disposition, than you are.”

“ Our relationship makes the resemblance very natural,” said Cyrilla, while she beckoned to Rupert, who just then perceived her.

“ The relationship might be nearer,” began the President.

“ I wish it were,” said Cyrilla.

“ Well, that’s candid,” he rejoined, with a mixed look of surprise and satisfaction.

“ Good morning, dear Rupert ! ” she cried, bounding towards him, and placing her arm within his; “ I have just been saying how I wish you were my brother.”

“ Humph ! ” murmured the President, “ that was not at all what I meant.”

They had all breakfasted, and Cyrilla was standing at the window, throwing crumbs of bread to the birds assembled on the gravel beneath, when Zorndorff appeared.

“ At last ! ” exclaimed the President, looking at his watch, “ and always *the* last.”

“ I suppose I remained too long in my bath,” answered Zorndorff, as he seated himself at the deserted table.

“ Yours was not like Rupert’s, in the lake, I suspect.”

“ Certainly not; for however the lake might tempt me on a sultry afternoon, I greatly prefer warm or at least tepid water in the morning, especially when I can have it by walking but a few steps from my dressing-room.”

“ I expect the carriage every moment,” said the President impatiently, as he looked out of the window, ap-

parently a little provoked at his nephew's dilatory manner of playing with his cup and spoon; "but, perhaps, you have no urgent business in Exfort to-day?"

"I have most urgent, most important business," answered Zorndorff, rising without having helped himself to any of the various things pushed towards him by Rupert; "and the sooner we can be off the better satisfied I shall be."

"Oh, there is time enough for you to eat your breakfast," said the President, softened by what he supposed a deference to his wishes, ". . . a time for everything, you know."

"There may be time, but there is no inclination in the present case. . . . I cannot eat."

"But you are not ill, I hope, Edouard?"

"In the sense you mean, no; but I have been suffering mental tortures for some time past that would deprive a more robust man than I am of all appetite."

"Perhaps," said Rupert laughing, "Seltzer water and Hochheimer would relieve your mental sufferings, at least that is what our assistant surgeon prescribes; you remember Wickmann, he studied with us at Jena?"

"He must be greatly changed if his prescriptions are worth much," answered Zorndorff; "but at all events I feel more inclined to consult a homœopath than any other on the present occasion." He turned to Cyrilla as he spoke, totally unconscious that Melanie had made all he had said more intelligible to her than he perhaps would have wished.

To his uncle his case had become as clear as if it had been stated on parchment with all the formal technicalities of what English lawyers call a *brief*, and as his carriage rolled under the portico he prepared to favour his nephew with an "*opinion*."

The pony-phaeton had been driven to the door at the same time, and while Zorndorff watched with slightly contracted brows Cyrilla's childish eagerness to seize the reins, and Rupert's laughing remonstrances at the experiments which she immediately tried with them, his uncle laid his

hand heavily on his shoulder and whispered, "Come, we have business to transact, and have no time for such fooleries."

Zorndorff turned away, and when seated by his uncle listened with quiet attention to the above-mentioned "opinion," which was given concisely and clearly.

"I quite agree with you," he said in reply; "and have little doubt that Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron intends to marry her cousin Rupert, for, as you justly observe, no two people can better suit each other." After a pause he added, "I have known many women more beautiful, much more beautiful than she is; any one so perfectly accomplished, so fascinating, I never even imagined."

"Strong language, Edouard—Let me recommend your not returning to Freilands."

"I had some such idea myself a few days ago; but, after all, I do not see why my probable marriage to a very different sort of woman at some future period should prevent me in the meantime from enjoying the society of others, ay, and admiring them too! I find I can get over paroxysms of admiration in a most satisfactory manner; for instance, the other day at that ball or *déjeûner*, as I looked at the Vicomtesse de Rubigny, I wondered what on earth I had ever found to admire about her; it was certainly not her sallow complexion or . . ."

"No," said the President, interrupting him; "but in that instance you must not forget that your admiration was cooled by—scorn."

"Scorn?"

"Why, yes—she scorned, not you most probably, but—your poverty; and like a true Lindesmar, turned to Rupert as the best *parti* to be had."

"And if the world may be believed," said Zorndorff with a bitter smile, "she was in her turn scorned by him in the most unceremonious manner too, and was glad to take refuge with her French relations and marry a worthless cousin, who little knew the way in which she had previously trifled with her reputation."

"All this may be true," said the President, "but is

totally uninteresting to us. Let me advise you to be satisfied with the really splendid position offered you, and not to waste your time longing for what is altogether out of your reach."

"You think that Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron would also scorn a poor Kammer assessor?"

"I think she is too amiable and too gentle to scorn any one; but you are both poor, and . . ."

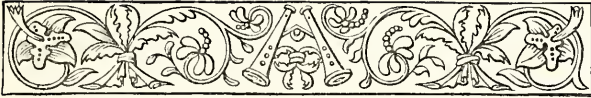
"Excuse me for interrupting you," cried Zorndorff eagerly, "but I really must ask you if you have ever perceived anything in her manner to make you think that . . ."

"And do you excuse me," said his uncle severely, "for never having taken the trouble to make any observations about what can in no way concern either of us. This, however, I *can* tell you, that Rupert does not scorn his cousin or she him; and that being the case, the best thing you can do is to get over this paroxysm of admiration, as you call it, with all convenient expedition, for as surely as he deprived you of the bright glances of Virginie's dark eyes, so surely will he obtain the still brighter smiles of my fair sister-in-law."


Zorndorff sank back in the corner of the carriage, and when he spoke again it was on matters of business, which made the President imagine that his well-meant advice had altogether turned the current of his nephew's thoughts, and even led him to hope that the affair was not so serious as he had at first supposed. Of all men in the world a thoroughbred bureaucratist is the most injudicious adviser on an occasion of this kind; such a man gives an opinion of a case of love as he would of a case of law, without taking the feelings of the parties concerned in the least degree into consideration. The President felt perfectly convinced that he had in a dignified manner pronounced sentence of death on his nephew's inclinations, quite unconscious that the words he had last spoken had not only piqued Zorndorff's jealousy, but also turned his still struggling ambition into a new channel—his passion for Cyrilla and wish to supersede Rupert, his rival in childhood, boyhood, and manhood, became identified; and while

listening with apparent interest to his uncle as he expatiated on his proposed reforms in different departments of his jurisdiction, he was in fact meditating on a complete change of all his plans, and determining that no obstacle should now induce him to waver in his resolution—no sacrifice should be too great were Cyrilla to be obtained by it.





CHAPTER XV.

S Rupert's leave of absence began to draw to a close, the gaieties at Freilands increased; one dinner party succeeded another with so little intermission that at length the Bellegardes and some others laughingly declared their intention of coming regularly from Exfort every morning, and spending the day there, and the plan was carried into execution, Rupert merely stipulating that his drives with his cousin in the pony-phaeton should not be interfered with.

Cyrilla had long been conscious that she was unremittingly watched by Zorndorff; and, though she nearly guessed the reason, she made no effort to contradict, by word or manner, what Melanie had said of her. There was something too earnest in his character to allow her to suppose that he would remain at Freilands without any fixed purpose, and she therefore felt no uneasiness, and rather avoided anything that might lead to an explanation, though she had observed that from the time that the Bellegardes and their coterie had invaded the house, he had scarcely spoken a word to her.

Melanie and her friends spent many hours every day in the often-mentioned balcony, shaded from the sun by an awning, the glass doors communicating with the reception-rooms, open and surrounded by exotic shrubs and flowers, ever green, ever fresh, a single drooping bough or a few withered leaves causing their immediate removal to the conservatory whence they came, while others, healthier and

brighter, supplied their places, and administered to the luxury of those who, spoiled by habit, scarcely bestowed a glance on them, or were conscious of enjoyment, as they inhaled their perfume.

The weather had become sultry; the few clouds visible seemed at times almost stationary, and not the faintest breath of wind was perceptible. All walking or boating parties had been necessarily deferred until late in the afternoon; and, leisurely sipping their coffee, the arrangements for them were discussed in the low languid tones which suited the half-reclining forms whence they proceeded. Rupert had promised to show a hermitage, which was on one of the islands in the lake, to Madame de Rubigny. Cyrilla had agreed to accompany them: "That is," she added, "if you give me time to write to mamma; I want to tell her that the President has proposed my going with him and Melanie to Aix-la-Chapelle."

"To Aix!" exclaimed Madame de Bellegarde. "So, Melanie, you are going to Aix again?"

"Yes; don't you envy me?"

"*Cela dépend!*" Count Zorndorff of course goes with you?"

"He may join us . . . perhaps . . .," replied Melanie, looking irresolutely towards Zorndorff, who gave no sign either of assent or dissent.

"And we," cried Madame de Bellegarde, "have nothing at all in prospect but a visit to grandpapa. I am so sorry you are going away—Exfort is so dull without you . . . but I shall be perfectly inconsolable when Freilands is shut up . . . I wonder Rupert does not leave the army, and live here altogether . . . so near the town, and everything one could wish!"

"I have latterly been thinking a little on the subject," said Rupert, who was displaying considerable skill while playing with a cup and ball.

"Have you?" said Melanie, looking up with some surprise, "I never could understand at all why you became a soldier."

"It is easily told," answered Rupert. "I entered the

army to get away from my aunt—perhaps too in order to have a right to wear a hussar's uniform, to which I took a fancy at a review. I have remained in it because it gives me occupation, and I like my brother officers, and live in the hopes of making a campaign or two before I a”

“Marry!” said Madame de Bellegarde, laughing; “I wish you would do so soon, and settle here: the idea that this is our last day at Freidlands is quite dreadful! Must you leave to-morrow?”

“Yes; but our regiment will probably be quartered at Exfort in a year or two.”

“A year or two! Why, that's an eternity!”

“To me also,” said Melanie, “it appears a long time to wait before we are likely to have Rupert with us again, and I confess”

“And I confess,” said Cyrilla, as she rose to leave them, “that I shall be very angry if I have to wait two years before I see him again.”

Rupert followed her, still playing with his cup and ball, and said, in a voice only audible to her and to Zorndorff, who now stood at a window reading a letter: “Cyrilla, you have only to say that you wish me to leave the army, and I am ready to do so, and give up for your sake all chance of a campaign.”

“All chance of being shot, you mean,” said Cyrilla, laughing.

“Perhaps so; but as the sacrifice is greater than you seem to imagine, I must tell you that I can only do so on condition”

“I hate conditions,” said Cyrilla, moving on.

“But you may as well listen to them”

“Impossible! Why, have I not told you that I must write to mamma about going to Aix, and after that you are to row me in the boat, you know; and then but I really wish you would go out with Madame de Rubigny, and return for me an hour hence. Do you know that this Virginie, about whom you were in doubt whether she were a devil or an angel, seems to have so little likeness to

Satan, that I begin to think you a hard-hearted, cruel wretch to have remained insensible to”

“Cyrilla!” cried Rupert reproachfully.

“Tell me the whole story, and I promise never to tease you again,” she continued; “but if you leave me to compose a romance of my own about you, I believe I must suppose that you preferred her sister Julie taste is perverse sometimes!”

“Do you really mean what you say?” asked Rupert, with unusual seriousness.

“No, I don’t,” she answered, smiling merrily; “for though I *might* have consented to your marriage with Virginie, were she still unmarried, I must tell you that I can never permit you to give me such a cousin as Julie de Lindesmar; and now go away and let me write my letter.”

He left her, and for nearly an hour silence reigned in the room to which she had retired; at the end of that time the sound of voices and retreating footsteps made her suppose that the balcony party had broken up, and from the window she could see some sauntering groups moving down the lime-tree walk. She folded and sealed her letter, and once more looking out of the window, she perceived Zorndorff alone, walking backwards and forwards near the house,—a black-edged, black-sealed letter, which she had seen him receive some hours before, in his hand. He read it again and again, and then walking a short distance down the alley, he threw himself on one of the seats and covered his face with his hand.

There is nothing in this world which enhances the value of any object we possess, or wish to possess, whether it be animate or inanimate, like the fear of losing it for ever. This fear had now taken possession of Zorndorff’s mind with regard to Cyrilla. He had overheard what Rupert had said to her,—perceived with surprise that she was still quite unconscious of her cousin’s intentions, and imagined that his last and only chance now was to speak before his rival. Under the influence of one of those ungovernable passions which make men for the time regardless of obstacles, and careless of the pain inflicted on others, he had

latterly only been deterred from doing so by uncertainty respecting her feelings; but even while half provoked at finding so much self-possession in one so young and child-like in appearance, he admired the very quality which caused his perplexity. When he saw her enter the alley on her way to her cousin, his only thought was how to induce her to stop and speak to him. The most natural thing he could have done would have been to have accompanied her to the lake. It never occurred to him, or he might have asked her some question about Melanie or the others who had not gone out. He never thought of it; so completely had his usual calm consideration forsaken him, that she had actually passed before he was able to exclaim, hurriedly, "Don't go to him . . . pray, don't go to him!"

"Not go to him, after he has waited so long for me?"

"Waited! oh no . . . he has been to the island with Madame de Rubigny, and has not yet returned . . . in her society he is not likely to take much note of time."

Cyrilla stopped and smiled. "I should like," she said quietly, "I should like very much to know what it is that people find so very fascinating in Madame de Rubigny; she is interesting-looking, certainly—in fact, handsome . . ."

"No," said Zorndorff, "she is not at all handsome."

"You say so," she rejoined, "because you happen not to be one of her admirers."

"I *was* one of them," said Zorndorff; and he observed with pleasure that his companion turned suddenly towards him with a look of inquiry and attention,—“but,” he added quickly, “not long.”

"I heard she was very agreeable," said Cyrilla, "and expected to find her more . . . what shall I say?—more talkative."

"She never talked more than she does now in general conversation," he replied; "but in a *tête-à-tête* she was, and is still most probably, what her husband would call *adorable*. Her real or pretended ingenuousness . . ."

"Ingenuousness!" repeated Cyrilla, "and I have never discovered a particle of anything resembling it!"

"I believe," said Zorndorff, "you never have seen what

she can be ; she is one of those women whose words and looks are reserved for our sex . . . Adlerkron could tell you enough about her if he chose."

"But he doesn't choose," said Cyrilla, seating herself at the other end of the seat ; "and I feel a great deal of natural curiosity on the subject. I suspect she married M. de Rubigny without caring much for him, and am almost sure she would have preferred Rupert."

"No doubt of it," said Zorndorff, with a contemptuous smile ; "she almost lost her reputation in her efforts to induce him to marry her . . . but whether actuated by love or interest is unknown ; I suspect the latter."

"I do not know her well enough to undertake her defence," said Cyrilla ; "but you must acknowledge that Rupert might easily be loved for himself alone."

"Not by a Lindesmar, believe me, Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron, and I know them long and well ; but why blame them for acting as others do ?—others from whom we might expect something quite different !"

Just then Cyrilla perceived in the distance Rupert's boat. She rose, and waved her handkerchief.

"Do not be in such a hurry, you see he is resting on his oars ; the boat is not moving—he—he is not thinking of you—now."

Again Cyrilla waved her handkerchief, and the boat shot forward in the direction of the landing-place. She looked towards Zorndorff ; he appeared a good deal agitated, but the expression of his face was incomprehensible to her, as one last violent struggle between love and ambition, poverty and wealth, passion and principle, took place in his mind. He crushed, with both hands and unconscious vehemence, the mourning letter, and its great black seal, and as her eye fell on the latter, it suddenly occurred to her that he might have lost some relation or friend. The letter had evidently contained painful intelligence ; he was unhappy. A woman's sympathy with domestic grief is as ready as her feelings under such trials are acute. Cyrilla turned back, and the look of kind unembarrassed interest with which she again approached him, renewed all his doubts,

and he scarcely listened to what she said until, with some hesitation, she added, "Though I can only speak at random, perhaps Melanie could . . ."

"Could what?" he asked impatiently.

"Could offer you some consolation, if you were to tell her the contents of that letter, which seems to have affected you so painfully."

"Can Melanie control the inclinations of people she has never seen? Can she influence the affections of those nearest to her?" he asked, and again his head sunk on his hand. "Go, and leave me more than ever a prey to the jealousy that has already almost tortured me to death."

"I . . . I thought you had lost some friend," said Cyrilla, glancing towards the letter; "and you are only jealous!"

"*Only* jealous!" he repeated, looking up; "but do you know of whom?"

Cyrilla shook her head.

"Of Adlerkron, who seems born to cross my purposes, mar my prospects, and destroy my only chance of future happiness!"

"I do not comprehend," began Cyrilla, not a thought of Rupert and herself combining themselves in her mind.

"And you do not know what I mean when I say that I am jealous,—*only* jealous—but *very* jealous;" and Zorn-dorff raised his flashing eyes to her, just as Rupert at the end of the alley, raised a flag as a signal of his arrival at the boat-house.

She waved her handkerchief twice in answer,—Zorn-dorff sprang from his seat, caught her hand as it descended, and exclaimed with vehemence,—“Can you not, or will you not, understand me?”

Impatiently releasing her hand, she cast a hurried glance towards the windows of the house; the tacit reproach was felt; he moved to the furthest end of the seat murmuring some words of excuse; and such is the command of looks and gestures acquired by constant intercourse with the world, that these two persons, both in a state of violent in-

ternal agitation, suddenly assumed an appearance of calmness, almost indifference, so powerfully had a few gay-coloured parasols protruding beyond the balcony reminded them that they were acting a scene in the drama of their lives, which, however tragically it might affect them, would most assuredly be viewed as comedy by the laughter-loving unwished-for spectators above them.

At this moment a couple of Rupert's dogs, evidently just escaped from confinement, came bounding towards them,—never had these emblems of fidelity appeared more opportunely. As Zorndorff's hand apparently caressed the sleek head of one of them, his jealousy, uncertainty, hope, fear, and love, found words of potent eloquence; and Cyrilla, while gently restraining the wild gambols of the other, very nearly concealed the anxiety which oppressed her. When he paused for an answer, and looked at her expectantly, she bent her head over Carlo's so as to hide her deep blushes from Zorndorff, as she faltered out hurriedly, but to his attentive ear quite distinctly, all he most desired to hear. One furtive glance he bestowed on the balcony, and then stood with his hat slightly raised above his head as she walked quickly down the avenue, followed by both dogs.

Had not Cyrilla been extremely pre-occupied, she would have immediately observed that Rupert was remarkably grave and quiet, and Madame de Rubigny even more taciturn than usual. A sign from him made both dogs spring into the boat, and crouch under the seats,—Cyrilla took the rudder in silence, and not one word was spoken until they reached the little wooden quay, where Rupert fastened the boat: the Vicomtesse de Rubigny, without looking up, declared her intention of remaining in it. Cyrilla stepped on shore, and when out of hearing observed: "You and Madame de Rubigny seem to have been quarrelling."

"No; but we have had a sort of explanation."

"The same, perhaps, with which you unintentionally favoured me when we met at Berlin."

"Very nearly. What a provoking memory you have! another would have forgotten all about it by this time."

"I have heard enough since from others to make me

remember,—they say she married M. de Rubigny without caring in the least for him.”

“ So she told me just now.”

“ Told you ?”

“ Yes ; but you need not look so shocked. If other people told you, why should not she tell me ?”

“ For a great many reasons ; and though not exactly shocked, I confess I am rather surprised at her telling you what I, your cousin, would *not* tell you in her place.”

“ Though you are my cousin, Cyrilla, we have been nearly strangers to each other until the last two months, —with Virginie I have been intimate all my life.”

“ I was not aware of that,” said Cyrilla, thoughtfully.

“ Since my earliest childhood I have known the Lindesmars, and frequented their house ; their brother Victor was my friend and schoolfellow until he went to his uncle in France, when I some way seemed to take his place in his family ; and all the follies of Adrienne de Bellegarde, all the devilry of Julie de Lindesmar, are as well known to me as if they had been really my sisters. Virginie, about my own age, and more my companion than any of them, I never could quite understand ; but I believe her to be infinitely superior to the others in every respect.”

“ I suppose she told you that it was the letter you wrote at her mother’s request which induced her to marry the Vicomte ?”

“ Something to that effect, and the idea is not agreeable.”

“ I cannot at all understand a woman marrying from pique,” said Cyrilla, “ and yet one hears of it so often. Nothing would induce me to marry a man I did not love.”

“ It is hard to say how one would act until the day of trial comes,” answered Rupert ; “ however, you are never likely to be tried as poor dear Virginie has been.”

“ But,” said Cyrilla, “ would it not have been better for her to have waited for a year or two, and at the end of that time she might have found some one she could like quite as well as you ?”

“ Unfortunately,” replied Rupert, slightly shrugging his shoulders, “ she will not believe in the possibility of a second love :—you do, it seems.”

Cyrilla did not answer.

"You do not like the question when put directly to yourself," said Rupert, laughing.

"I rather wish to avoid discussions of this kind," said Cyrilla slowly, "as I don't like talking about what I do not understand."

"You understand as much about the matter as I do, perhaps; an interchange of thoughts might between us be as profitable as—as—amusing."

"Well, then," began Cyrilla, "I can imagine a man loving several times . . ."

"So can I," said Rupert, "in fact continually, until—until—he is married, when, of course, he comes to a full stop either from choice or necessity."

Cyrilla looked up inquiringly.

"Why, you know, either he likes his wife too well to think of any other woman, or, what nearly comes to the same thing, other women cease to think of him because he has got a wife."

Cyrilla smiled.

"And now tell me, can you imagine a woman loving several times?"

"Don't ask me."

"But I must—that is what I most want to know."

"One hears and reads of such things," began Cyrilla.

"I don't want to know what one hears of or reads, I wish to know what you think possible or probable."

"So much," replied Cyrilla, "depends upon circumstances over which we have no control."

"Agreed," cried Rupert; "but you are giving your opinion so unwillingly, that you must allow me to suppose some of these circumstances. Suppose, for instance, a woman's love were slighted?"

"In that case, she should conceal and conquer it," answered Cyrilla quickly.

"And love again?"

"It is to be hoped so."

"And were the person loved unworthy of regard . . ."

"Fortunately," said Cyrilla laughing, "a woman's

imagination, in such cases, supplies all deficiencies, and nothing but facts, plain downright facts, can ever convince her of what she must be so unwilling to believe."

"Then," cried Rupert, with heightened colour, "then let us leave nothing to the imagination, but suppose at once, that a man returns a woman's love—gives her his heart because he cannot help himself, but from egotistical interested motives bestows his hand on another—what then?"

"Egotistical interested motives," repeated Cyrilla, "there may be some who could pardon—and excuse even that—I could not. I should despise—I am afraid almost hate—but why do we talk of such disagreeable things, and you really look as if you were quite in earnest. Ah, there's the new harbour—how pretty! but it will require at least two years before the creepers have covered the top of it. I suppose," she added, gaily, "I suppose it was here you waited for me with Madame de Rubigny, and it was here she filled your head with all those dreadful thoughts about slighted love and desertion?"

"Exactly; she prophesied me all the horrors of being slighted."

"I don't think you have much to fear on that score," said Cyrilla; "the President gave Melanie to understand, that your too great *succes auprès des dames* had caused our uncle Gottfried great uneasiness."

"Pshaw—nonsense."

"Don't break off the branches of that honeysuckle," she cried, pushing his hand away from the plant; "the whole summer will not repair the mischief you have done. Next year when you return here, this jessamine will be at least as tall as I am!"

"Perhaps so," he replied absently.

And they walked on silently, until between the trees he caught a glimpse of the boat and Madame de Rubigny reclining listlessly in the stern. "She has a great deal of observation, and may be right," he observed.

"Who?" asked Cyrilla, looking up with a puzzled air; her thoughts (and unrequited love was not among them) had wandered from the island—"Whom do you mean?"

“ Virginia.”

“ I daresay she has a good deal of observation,” said Cyrilla, making an effort to be interested in what seemed to have in some way taken possession of her cousin’s mind ; “ most intelligent people who are silent in company, are observant of all that is going on about them.”

“ Then,” rejoined Rupert, “ perhaps a remark of hers may interest you.”

“ Perhaps it may ; let me hear it.”

“ She has discovered that Zorndorff is irretrievably in love with you.”

“ Has she ?” said Cyrilla, stooping to gather some flowers ; “ and do you know what I have discovered ?”

“ The same thing, perhaps,” said Rupert.

“ No,” replied Cyrilla, laughing, “ I think it better to wait until I am told such things ; but,” she added in a whisper, as they approached the quay, “ it has become evident to me that she is annoyed at our liking each other so much !”

“ And *do* you like me ?”

“ Dearest Rupert, can you doubt it ?” cried Cyrilla, as she lightly leaned on his arm and sprang into the boat.

The sultry day closed with a sunset of unusual brilliancy, and the last yellow rays played gaily on the bright summer dresses of the loungers on the balcony, as they watched the changing form of the gold-coloured clouds, and unreservedly regretted their approaching separation. Without exactly caring much for each other, their education, habits and manners were so similar, their position in the world so much the same, and they were in their determination to rule the society of Exfort so united, that all petty jealousies had ceased. They knew and laughed at each other’s foibles without hesitation, and were so very unreserved in their remarks and raillery, that Cyrilla, whose acquaintance with them was of recent date, not unfrequently experienced a confused feeling of apprehension, and dreaded nothing so much as becoming, if only for a day, the subject of their mirth. It had been this fear which had given her strength that morning to listen, apparently unmoved, to

words of incalculable importance and interest, and had enabled her to answer them, and stake her life's happiness, without daring to bestow one glance on the man in whose hands she had resolved unreservedly to place it; and it was the same motive which now induced her, not only to listen, but to join in the desultory conversation which was carried on, though she longed to take refuge in her room to think over the momentous words she had spoken—the promise she had made without one thought of her mother,—that mother whose idol she had been all her life, and who, she more than suspected, would disapprove of an engagement that must necessarily be of some years' continuance, and the termination of which would be at best so far beneath her often expressed hopes and expectations. It was, therefore, with unmixed feelings of satisfaction, that Cyrilla saw the different carriages drive up before the house, and from the balcony watched the departures. As the last disappeared behind the trees, and Rupert, having completed his cheerful *adieux*, turned into the house, Zorn-dorff approached her and said, "I intend to return home this evening, to—to write—some letters . . ."

"And I," answered Cyrilla, "must also write—to my mother."

"Not until we have spoken—that is, consulted Melanie," he said eagerly; "to-morrow we shall meet without the restraint which has latterly been so intolerable to me." After a moment's pause and hesitation, he added, "I am sorry to be obliged to request you to let our engagement remain a secret for the present—it is absolutely necessary—unavoidable for some time at least;" and then, without waiting for an answer, he fervently but hastily pressed her hand to his lips, and turned to meet Rupert, whose voice he heard in the adjoining room. "Adieu, Adlerkron," he began, "we shall not meet again for some time, and therefore . . ."

"And therefore," cried Rupert, interrupting him, "you think it incumbent on you to leave me twelve hours sooner than is necessary! Come—be sociable for once in your life, and remain here until after breakfast to-morrow."

"I cannot," replied Zorndorff; "there is a letter which must be sent to the post to-night . . ."

"Write here," cried Rupert, "and send an express into Exfort."

"The letter," said Zorndorff, unwillingly; but, as if he thought it necessary to excuse himself in some way, "the letter is . . . already written, and only requires date and seal . . . but it is in my writing-desk at home, and I . . ."

"A letter written and put aside for consideration!" said Rupert. "That sounds mysterious, but will scarcely justify your abrupt departure, after having so far fulfilled your destiny as to remain here during the . . ."

"Fulfilled my destiny! What do you mean?"

"Come, don't pretend to have forgotten the time you had your *planet ruled*, or whatever the proper expression may be for having one's fortune told by the stars, instead of with a pack of cards! You look now as if you would rather you had not told me."

"O not at all," said Zorndorff; "but I am rather surprised at your remembering what I had altogether forgotten."

"What!" exclaimed Rupert, "have you forgotten that you are to be married twice?"

"Nonsense," said Zorndorff, turning away, while a fearful paleness overspread his features, and even his lips were white when he spoke to his aunt.

"Edouard, you must tell me about this," she whispered, "some day when we are alone."

"I cannot remember—it is too long ago," he answered impatiently.

"He is ashamed of believing such things," continued Rupert, laughing; then, suddenly perceiving that Zorndorff looked annoyed, he added: "Yet greater men than he is have been . . . credulous—actually and deliberately working out the predictions made them. Wallenstein, Duke of Friedland, for instance, whose astrologer was no less a person than Kepler himself! And then Napoleon, who, they say, not unfrequently consulted the famous Lenormaud."

“I could tell you a curious thing about that Mademoiselle Lenormaud,” began Melanie; but Zorndorff hastily took leave, and though Rupert professed the greatest curiosity about it, she persisted in saying that “there was no use in telling him anything of that kind.”

“Then,” said Rupert, leaning over the back of her chair, and lowering his voice, so that his words were inaudible to the President; “then let me tell you something of another kind:—I—should—like to marry—Cyrilla.”

“What!” cried Melanie, looking at him incredulously; “you don’t mean to insinuate that you think seriously of marriage?”

“I don’t insinuate, but say plainly, that I wish to marry Cyrilla, if she will consent. However, as I don’t want to take her by surprise, and have reason to suppose that she has never thought about me in that way, you had better talk to her to-night, and before morning she can make up her mind one way or other.”

“Oh!” cried Melanie, “I am afraid . . . that is, she . . . oh, why did you not speak sooner?”

“Why, you know, or rather, perhaps, you do not know, that I had determined not to marry her, or indeed any one else, for ten years at least; and though I liked her from the first, it is only about a week ago that I discovered how much, and all that sort of thing; and now I wish I could carry her off at once, without any unnecessary talk or ceremony, for I don’t at all like the idea of a separation.”

Melanie gazed fixedly on the ground, and spoke not a word.

“Well,” he added, after a moment’s pause, “can you not say something—say, at least, that you approve—that you wish . . .”

“I wish,” said Melanie, “I wish you had not remained so long in Berlin—I wish you had acted differently during the week we were there—I wish you had shown a little more *empressement* in the first instance . . .”

“Never mind that now,” cried Rupert, impatiently; “Cyrilla has long forgotten it, and is such a dear rational creature, that I have great hopes she may discover she

could not do better than take me, and have her own way all the rest of her life."

"It would be, in every respect, a most rational sort of marriage," began Melanie, slowly; "and," she added, musingly, "and one that most probably my aunt, and most certainly my stepmother, would approve."

"O, I am quite aware of that," said Rupert. "I have already had more than one letter from my aunt, almost commanding me to make this proposal. If I had not admired Cyrilla immensely, such communications would have been sufficient to have made me avoid her altogether. I don't like to have a wife forced upon me; but, in this instance, I am disposed to overlook the circumstance and submit to my aunt's consent, if I can only obtain Cyrilla's."

"I shall speak to her to-night," said Melanie. "You are right to give her time to think; in fact, you might give her more time, for your love is, of course, merely that sort of quiet regard which persons devoid of sentiment usually experience."

"You need not analyze my love," said Rupert, "though, perhaps, it would bear the process quite as well as other people's; but tell Cyrilla of it . . . and if she wish for time to consider, why . . . I can wait a day or two . . . anything reasonable; but the sooner she can make up her mind the better, as the affair could be got up without any delay or difficulty, and I think we suit each other remarkably well!"

Melanie longed to contradict the last assertion, but she forbore. Fully aware of the advantages of such a marriage for her sister, and quite disposed to do justice to Rupert's many good qualities, she considered acquiescence on her part a duty; but Zorndorff appeared to her so eminently attractive—so infinitely superior to her cousin and all other men, that she scarcely for a moment doubted what Cyrilla's decision would be. The few hesitating words of worldly wisdom with which she that night thought it necessary to accompany her communication, was heard by her astonished sister with such indignation, and answered so quickly by apt quotations from her own speeches, that

Melanie was instantly and effectually silenced. When afterwards informed of the explanation that had already taken place between Cyrilla and Zorndorff, she became, and acknowledged herself from that time forward, her nephew's warmest advocate, hoping, as she magnanimously declared to her sister, that she should be able to procure for her that domestic happiness, of which she had herself been so cruelly deprived !





CHAPTER XVI.



THE supposition that decision of mind and firmness of purpose must necessarily be appropriately embodied, is by no means uncommon ; yet very cursory observation will lead to the discovery that the person and features do not always represent these qualities, even when inherent in no common degree,—that mild, gentlemanly men can be uncommonly obstinate, and gentle, delicate women scarcely less so ; and we may, without hesitation, use this odious word to such persons, as however the hard-featured and inflexible-looking may dare to brave their friends, those whose appearance leads to the supposition of pliancy are invariably termed obstinate when they assert or act upon an opinion of their own. Cyrilla may therefore be called obstinate ; and it must be confessed that her short decided answers to her sister, and impatient, passionate exclamations, seemed ill to suit the fragile form and youthful face of the speaker ; yet, although she continued firm, unshaken even for a moment, it appeared at least more natural when, at the end of their conference, she burst into tears, and declared her unalterable resolution to keep her engagement with Zorndorff, even if it should last for twenty years !

The next morning, Rupert followed her to the drawing-room, and waited patiently while she collected her scattered sketches and drawing materials, her maid following her round the room with a portfolio, endeavouring to understand some confused directions about how the pencil-

drawings were to be laid that they might not be rubbed. A few books which Rupert had given her she also took up in a hurried manner, and then showed a very evident intention of making her escape altogether. But she was recalled by him; and, half laughingly, half seriously, requested to resign herself to the horrors of a *tête-à-tête*, which, he assured her, was now quite inevitable.

“O, I have not the least objection to a *tête-à-tête* with you, if—if—”

“If I were going to talk nonsense as usual,” said Rupert, smiling; “but this time you must listen to the words of wisdom, strange as they will sound to you, coming from my lips. Melanie has, of course, told you . . .”

“Oh! Rupert, dear Rupert, don’t talk about that; pray, don’t. Remember all you said to me yourself the first time we met at Exfort!”

“I don’t remember what I said, but I daresay it was something very different from what I want to say now.”

“Perhaps so; but I remember perfectly your very words—words of wisdom they were. . . . You said that you had a sort of moral antipathy to the idea of cousins being anything to each other but cousins; that you would as soon think of marrying your grandmother, if you had one, as a cousin; and that you could almost hate our aunt for having cast a shadow over the commencement of our intercourse by her absurd and most improper proposition!”

“I talked a precious lot of nonsense that day,” said Rupert, gravely.

“But after saying all this to me,” continued Cyrilla, quite aware of the advantage she had over him, “after saying all this, how could you expect me to . . . to think of what you now propose?”

“Very true,” said Rupert, still more gravely, “I was, and am, a fool; that is evident.”

“No,” cried Cyrilla eagerly, and mistaking his quiet manner for resignation or indifference; “no, you are my dear, kind cousin, Rupert; and, believe me, no cousin could like another better than I do you.”

“Indeed!” said Rupert, looking at her inquiringly;

“then I will wait until you have learned to like me better. You shall have weeks, months, a whole year if you require it! I promise to quit the army, too, and live here. You like Freidlands, don't you?”

“O, so much!” answered Cyrilla; “the six weeks that I have spent here have been the happiest of my whole life!”

“And mine, too!” said Rupert; “and I do not see why we should not go on being happy, when there is nothing in the world to prevent it.”

“If we could only live on just as we have done lately!” began Cyrilla, with a sigh.

“That will scarcely be possible,” said Rupert; “for the President would never consent to reside altogether with me, in order that . . .” here he burst into a merry laugh, and then added, “You must perceive, dear Cyrilla, that nothing but a marriage can enable us to live on together here; and, therefore . . .”

“I am sorry for it,” said Cyrilla, interrupting him hastily; “but you must not speak any more about that—at least to me.”

“And to whom else?” asked Rupert.

“Any one you please. I am not so vain as to expect, not so selfish as to wish, that you should not find some one more worthy of your affection than I am.”

“And I,” said Rupert, with imperturbable good-humour, “I have the vanity to think that we suit each other perfectly, and am selfish enough to hope that you may *not* find any one more worthy of your affection than I am.”

Cyrilla blushed, and walked to one of the windows, while he continued: “It is not my nature to be jealous, or I might perhaps have suspected a rival in Zorndorff; but from him I have nothing to fear. With his luxurious inclinations and ambitious plans, even you—even an angel from heaven—could not move him, if not possessed of wealth!”

“There are some passions stronger than ambition or the love of wealth,” suggested Cyrilla, in a low voice.

“Not with him. Besides, I have heard it said that he

has only to stretch out his hand to find that of one of the richest heiresses in Germany placed joyfully in his."

"I think you must be mistaken; he never made the most distant allusion to anything of the kind."

"I should have been surprised if he had," said Rupert; "excepting, perhaps, to Melanie."

Cyrilla became very pale, and sat down on the nearest chair, looking up as if she expected to hear more.

"It may be nothing but a report," continued Rupert, "but I have heard it repeatedly, and should have mentioned it had I thought it necessary—hitherto I have had no motive—you have so invariably given me the preference whenever we came in competition, that I was vain enough to imagine you liked me better than him. It was too much to expect you, at your age, to be insensible to such extraordinary personal advantages as his!" This was said half-interrogatively; but, as he received no answer, he added, "You think him very handsome, of course?"

"I think beauty of very little importance for a man," she answered evasively.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Cyrilla—Zorndorff, too, despises beauty in his own sex, and has often told me that he would willingly submit to be metamorphosed into the ugliest fellow that ever existed, provided wealth were bestowed on him."

"I never heard him express an opinion of that kind," began Cyrilla, with a look of anxiety.

"Very likely," said Rupert; "I dare say there are many of his opinions with which he has thought it unnecessary to make you acquainted—and it is quite as well that it is so."

"Rupert—you don't like him, that is evident."

"I always thought I did, until to-day," he answered candidly; "but without apprehending that I have any just cause for jealousy, I now feel disposed to point out his faults to you, because I am conscious that I must lately have appeared to great disadvantage by a comparison with him!"

"I don't know that," said Cyrilla thoughtfully. "The

President says that a contrast with you makes his nephew appear a perfect egotist ; and though Melanie thinks that in your place and with your means he would be equally generous ”

“ Don’t call me generous—I have never made an effort to be so more than two or three times in all my life.”

Cyrilla looked surprised.

“ My idea of generosity,” said Rupert, “ is not giving of one’s abundance—that is not only a Christian duty but a debt of gratitude for having much to bestow ; the pleasure of giving, too, is a reward, if one be necessary ; but doing without something oneself in order to give to another is generosity ; and yet,” he added musingly, “ that repays itself too—sometimes—often.”

“ And when were you lately generous according to your ideas ?” asked Cyrilla with some curiosity.

“ I see you want to make me forget the important subject we were discussing,” said Rupert smiling ; “ but you must let me return to where we started, and ask you if my being your cousin is the only reason you have for rejecting me ?”

“ Have you not told me yourself,” said Cyrilla, “ that you considered it an all-sufficient one ?”

“ But I have ceased to think it any reason whatever ; and you must forgive my offering you some advice on this occasion.”

“ Well, what is it ?” asked Cyrilla, rather pettishly.

“ That you take time to consider before you refuse my proposal. You say you like me, and in that case I think you ought to consult your mother—your sister—and ”

“ No, Rupert—on this subject, and on this one alone, I think myself a better judge than my mother, sister, or any one in the world could be for me.”

“ Remember, Cyrilla, how very young you are !”

“ I am old enough,” she said, rising, “ quite old enough to know the difference between the intimate friendship that I feel for you and love when put to the proof.”

“ Stay, Cyrilla,” cried Rupert, catching her hand as she

passed him; "stay—your words alarm me . . . not so much for myself as for you. Virginie was right after all—she told me you did not care for me, and that you loved Zorndorff. I did not, would not believe her, but I fear it is so. Oh, my dear cousin, listen to me for one moment; forget all I have said about myself, and do not misunderstand my motives, when I warn you not to place your happiness in his keeping."

"You suppose he may really have thought of marrying some one in Berlin?" said Cyrilla, trying to smile, while her lips quivered.

"People said so—it may be true, or it may not—in either case, Cyrilla, avoid him, or you will be a most unhappy woman!"

"How strongly prejudiced you are against him!" she exclaimed reproachfully.

"I can say nothing now that will not appear so to you," rejoined Rupert. "It grieves me to think that you will throw away your love, and waste the best years of your life on a man who, however much his selfish passion may lead him to monopolize you now, will end by marrying another. You will never be his wife!"

"Nor yours either," said Cyrilla, with some irritation; "so let us talk no more on this disagreeable subject."

"There is still one thing which I believe I ought to say to you," began Rupert, and then he stopped and hesitated.

"Well," she said, turning round with ill-concealed impatience, "what is it?"

"You had better not—tell my aunt that you refused to listen to my . . ."

"O, you need be under no apprehension on that score," said Cyrilla, with a slightly satirical smile, "I am aware how sensitive men are on such occasions, and promise you . . ."

"Promise me nothing," he cried, interrupting her, while a flush of anger passed across his face. "Promise me nothing; I spoke for your advantage and thought not at all of myself. If I am what you call sensitive, it is only

to the very unkind construction you give to all my words. As far as I am concerned the whole world may know that I love you. I do so too sincerely not to hope that you may never feel the pain you have now inflicted on me."

He left the room as he spoke, and she stood for some minutes completely overcome by a succession of the most contending and afflicting emotions. A sense of having treated her cousin unkindly remained uppermost in her mind; and after walking irresolutely up and down the room for a few minutes she slowly followed him, looked timidly at the door of his study for some time before she ventured to pronounce his name, and then, receiving no answer, she turned away, and through one of the windows caught a glimpse of him as he strode quickly down the lime-tree walk surrounded by his dogs. "He is too good-natured to be angry, and too light-hearted to be unhappy," was her thought as she descended the stairs to her sister's dressing-room.

Melanie was as usual lingering over her late breakfast; she was also composing poetry; her lips were parted, her eyes turned to the ceiling, while the fingers of her left hand, moving as if on the keys of a pianoforte, formed the metronome of her thoughts.

"'Lines on leaving Freidlands, for Rupert.' Shall I read them to you, Cyrilla?" she asked, not in the least observing the anxious expression of her sister's features.

"Not just now. I must ask you a question. Tell me, Melanie, did you ever hear of Count Zorndorff's being supposed to be engaged to any one . . . I mean to a very rich heiress?"

"Never," replied Melanie, with a look of such unfeigned surprise, that Cyrilla felt at once re-assured. She took a long breath and sat down.

"Did Rupert tell you this?" asked Melanie after a pause.

"Yes; but as a report for the truth of which he could not vouch. He seemed to think you must have heard of it."

"And so I should—if not from others, from Edouard himself, for his confidence in me is, I believe, unlimited.

It is, however, possible that some heiress may have imagined that he was paying her attention, and people may have talked about it because she was an heiress; but for my part I am convinced of the truth of his assertion that you are the only woman he has ever really loved in all his life."

"I cannot bear for a moment to suspect him of anything dishonourable," said Cyrilla, in a faltering voice; "but oh, Melanie, why did he recommend, almost insist on secrecy? Surely he cannot expect me not to tell my mother?"

"Of course not; but it will be time enough when you see her, I should think; and why provoke the opposition of your aunt when you are aware of the enmity that exists between her and Edouard's father, and can easily imagine how angry she will be? In fact, if you could make up your mind not to tell any one until Edouard was promoted to some higher situation, it would be better for all parties."

"Nothing in the world I dread so much as having anything to conceal from my mother," observed Cyrilla, despondingly.

"And yet," said Melanie, "I must say she is the very last person I could ever wish to confide in—she is too clever, too decided, and much too worldly to be consulted on an occasion of this kind. From her you have nothing to expect but commands to marry Rupert, and orders to return home immediately, in disgrace with all your family. I can never forget the cold irony with which she treated my love for Englmann—the unfeeling manner in which she required the mutual resignation of all our love-tokens; but," she added, with a smile of satisfaction—"but when I saw that Valentin only returned the half of the lock of hair I had given him, I retained this little ugly ring, which never has and never shall leave my finger."

"I should *not* have retained the ring," said Cyrilla; "but if the President had no objection, of course no one else can."

"I never asked Wilhelm. I would not name such a thing to him, even now, for any consideration: besides, he was jealous at first; and never shall I forget his rage on

finding me looking over some poems which I had written before I ever saw him. He would not listen to my explanations, dashed my little casket to atoms, and tore the papers to pieces."

"Is it possible that the President can be in a passion?" asked Cyrilla.

"I only saw him in one—*that once*—but the contrast to his usually cold satirical manner was so great, that, though surprised and shocked at his violence, I never felt anything so nearly like love for him as at that moment, and think if he had gone on being jealous and furious, I should have liked him at last; but," she continued, with a sigh, "he would not be jealous any more, and I had not courage to tell him that Valentin alone possessed my heart and occupied my thoughts!"

Cyrilla did not seem to hear. She was looking at the watch on the toilet. "Don't you think," she observed, after a few minutes' silence, during which Melanie finished the composition of the "Lines on leaving Freidlands"—"Don't you think you could be ready to go to Exfort in an hour? I wish so much to see Count Zorndorff again, and put an end to my present state of uncertainty."

An unusual stillness pervaded the whole house, and especially the hitherto so gay reception-rooms, as Cyrilla and her sister stepped for the last time into the balcony, and looking round them saw Rupert sauntering homewards. He quickened his steps when he observed Melanie's carriage before the house, and the impatient horses compelling the coachman to make frequent circuits of the gravelled space before the entrance.

"My dear Rupert," she said, when he joined them, "you look so serious that I could almost fancy you were as sorry to lose us as we to lose you."

"You *know* I am more so, Melanie; but I have no intention of sinking under my disappointment, or yielding to useless regrets. I shall make the most violent exertions to forget the last six weeks; and by the time we meet again I shall be nearly as jolly as ever."

There was such an ill-concealed effort at cheerfulness in

his manner, that Cyrilla, half beseechingly, held out her hand and said: "You . . . are not angry with me, Rupert?"

"Heaven forbid that I should be so unreasonable," he replied quickly. "Experience has taught me that the affections cannot be controlled. I see," he added, turning to Melanie, "that you have written a 'farewell,' and only hope it is not an affecting one, for I don't think I could stand anything lachrymose just now."

"Lines on leaving a place where we have been happy, and saying farewell to one we love, without knowing when we may meet again, can scarcely be gay," answered Melanie; and half exulting in the thought of moving her hearers, she began in a low monotonous voice to recite them.

Music has been called the "poetry of the air." May not poetry be supposed the music of the mind? Melanie's manner of reading was so insipid, and produced a discordance so disagreeable to Cyrilla's feelings, that she at length interrupted her by saying: "No one should ever read their own compositions. You are not doing justice to your poem, Melanie: give it to me."

For a moment her eye ran quickly over the paper, and then with inexpressible grace and a correctness of emphasis, pauses, and tones that evinced both study and practice, she read the lines, awakening, in a most extraordinary degree, the sympathy of both her companions.

"You clever creature!" exclaimed Rupert, when she had ceased; "every day brings some new talent to light."

"That is not a talent," said Cyrilla; "it is an accomplishment requiring as much practice and instruction as any other."

"Cyrilla, you have now quite convinced me," said Melanie, "that for a woman a careful education is more desirable than talent, and accomplishments—greatly preferable to genius."

"Perhaps so," said Cyrilla; "we can talk about that some other time; but let us now take leave of Rupert, and go home. If parting be half as disagreeable to him as it is to me, he will wish it over."

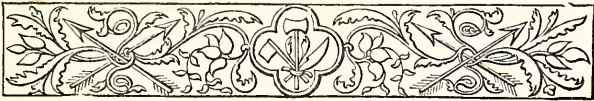
“What I most wish,” said Rupert quietly, “is, that a time may come when you will *feel* for me the affection which you now so unreservedly express.”

“And you do not believe me!” said Cyrilla, reproachfully.

“I believe you think yourself sincere; and I am sure you like me as well as you do half-a-dozen other men who do not care about the matter. Unless something quite unforeseen should occur, we shall not meet for a long time, Cyrilla,—not, perhaps, until you have learned to think differently of me, and of others to.”

Neither Cyrilla nor Melanie wished to pursue the subject further; they left the balcony, followed by Rupert, and parted with a forced gaiety of which they were all quite conscious, but which they supposed it necessary to assume before their servants. The higher the rank, the more frequently occasions present themselves for acting a part—most often of all, in palaces.





CHAPTER XVII.



HE fear of being overheard or interrupted by the President induced Melanie to summon her nephew to her boudoir directly she heard of his arrival at her house. He entered the room with an appearance of such joyous expectation, and advanced towards them so eagerly, that she half turned to Cyrilla, who leaned on the back of her chair, and exclaimed, "O! can you suspect or doubt, when he looks as he does now?"

"Suspect!—doubt!" repeated Zorndorff, turning from one to the other, while a shade of displeasure began to darken his handsome features.

"Tell him what I have heard, Melanie," whispered Cyrilla, timidly.

"We have been told," began Melanie, with some reluctance, "that . . . there was some one of large fortune . . . to whom you were generally supposed to be . . . engaged."

"Rupert your informant, of course; but I can forgive his saying anything in the first burst of annoyance at the only disappointment he has ever met with in his life."

"I knew," cried Melanie triumphantly, "I knew it was a mere report; perhaps without the slightest foundation?"

Cyrilla looked up anxiously.

Zorndorff hesitated a moment, and then replied "N—o; not altogether without foundation."

"If," said Cyrilla, hurriedly, "if an engagement exist . . . tell me so at once."

"And then . . ." said Zorndorff, quickly, "and then?"

“And then, let ours be at an end.”

“Perhaps you wish it to be so,” he said, haughtily; “and in that case no explanation is necessary.”

“Edouard,” cried Melanie, reproachfully, “this is not the manner in which you ought to speak to Cyrilla. Do not force her to repent a promise which she made with such unreserved confidence; what she desires to know is reasonable, and you are bound to answer her.”

“You are right,” said Zorndorff; “and after all there is little to relate. Young men generally become acquainted, often intimate, with the sisters of their friends; and I formed no exception to the rule.”

“Then the person to whom Rupert referred was the sister of a friend?”

“Yes; the daughter of a banker, with the prospect of an unusually large fortune, and surrounded by applicants for her favour.”

“So, it was a serious affair, after all?”

“The world said so, and my father ardently desired the connexion, as what I most wanted, wealth, was to be obtained by it; but . . .” he stopped and bit his lip.

“But what?” cried Melanie, impatiently. “Do you mean to say she refused you?”

“N—o.”

“Her father refused his consent, perhaps?”

“No.”

“Then you refused yours,” said Melanie, smiling.

Zorndorff was silent; he took up a book from the table, turned over the leaves, and showed most evidently that he wished to end the conversation.

Cyrilla was too deeply interested to observe this, and said, earnestly, “This is what I understood from Rupert; but he seemed to think that the temptation would be too great for you to resist; her fortune is so immense.”

“It has become immense by the death of her brother. Rupert would of course be sceptical, if I said that such a dower would overwhelm me; it seems like a reversal of the order of things, when a woman bestows all, and a man has nothing but himself to offer.”

“If you had liked her, you would not have thought of that for a moment.”

“Perhaps not; but as I did not in the least care for her, it served as an excuse for terminating an affair in which my father had from the first interested himself more deeply than ever I had done.”

“Is your father so very interested?” asked Cyrilla, with some alarm.

“Not altogether, in the sense you mean,” answered Zorndorff, half smiling; “he was interested about Margaret, on account of her personal sufferings. She was subject to nervous attacks of a painful and dangerous description; and it was in consequence of one of these illnesses that people began to talk about an engagement, as I was obliged to spend hours beside her sofa, holding her hand in mine, her father imagining this the only preservative against a recurrence of the spasms, or whatever they were called.”

“Did you observe anything like mesmeric sleep?” asked Melanie, eagerly. “Did you feel any loss of strength, as she began to recover?”

“More loss of temper than loss of strength; I never felt so bored and irritated in my life.”

“Perhaps the irritation of her nerves had communicated itself to yours . . . perhaps . . .”

“Spare me,” cried Zorndorff, hastily; “the subject is disagreeable, most painful to me; and if,” he added, turning to Cyrilla, “if you can forgive my impatient answer just now, and are satisfied with my explanation, I hope it will never again be mentioned.”

“I am quite satisfied,” said Cyrilla; “for if I have rightly understood you, there has been no engagement entered into, and therefore there is none to be broken off on my account; so, I suppose, I may now write to my mother?”

Zorndorff was silent, and for more than a minute appeared to think intently. “I have no reasonable objection,” he then said slowly; “but I should greatly prefer your waiting until your return to Salzburg; we have un-

fortunately time enough before us for explanation and discussion, and on the part of your aunt you may be prepared for the most violent opposition."

"That I know," said Cyrilla, "and agree with you in thinking it better to avoid giving her a subject of animadversion; but from my mother I have never had any concealment, and her consent, even if unwillingly given, would relieve my mind from all anxiety."

"Then write to her," said Zorndorff, "but not just yet; grant me a few weeks' delay. I have such an unconquerable misgiving that my dream of happiness will be but short . . . her answer may end it . . . may separate us for ever!"

"It will not, if Melanie write at the same time with me. You know mamma might not believe all I intend to say in your favour; but Melanie can write letters that would move the very stones."

"If you will both defer writing until you are about to leave Exfort, it is all I desire."

"Cyrilla, you can hardly refuse this, his only request," observed Melanie.

"Stay," cried Zorndorff, "I have another to add to it; I am still more anxious that my uncle should be kept in ignorance of our engagement until he has used his influence to procure me the situation which I hope will lead to fortune and honour. That once obtained, even he can hardly oppose my wishes, although I know he has other plans for me."

"And for Cyrilla, too," said Melanie. "He is quite persuaded she intends to marry Rupert, and has repeatedly desired me to point out all the advantages of such a marriage to her; his opposition would be strong, and not, I fear, confined to words . . . so you see, Cyrilla . . ."

"I see that I am doomed to . . . secrecy."

"And is it possible you ever thought of consulting Wilhelm?"

"No," replied Cyrilla, "I am too much afraid of him for that; but I certainly was equally far from intending deliberately to deceive him."

“There is no deception,” said Melanie. “You will merely be silent, that is all; and surely this very innocent little mystery will have some charm for you, if a particle of romance be left in your disposition.”

Cyrilla shook her head very gravely.

“Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron will not condescend to be romantic,” said Zorndorff.

“The word romantic cannot prevent me from feeling that I am about to do that of which my mother would disapprove,” said Cyrilla, turning her tearful eyes to her sister’s face.

“That I dare not dispute,” rejoined Zorndorff; “there is no doubt that your mother would greatly prefer your cousin Rupert for a son-in-law—that she would like to hear you congratulated by your friends—would like to be herself envied by all mothers who had daughters to dispose of; and, putting all the necessity for secrecy out of the case, Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron . . . it is enormous presumption on my part, having ever dared to . . . love you. Perhaps I might, perhaps I could, have resigned you, had you not yourself said that . . . O, Cyrilla,” he exclaimed, passionately, “write, say, do what you please—anything, but recall the words you spoke yesterday.”

“I have no wish to recall them,” said Cyrilla, in a low voice.

“The most distant allusion to their purport in my uncle’s presence would cause my banishment from Exfort, and effectually separate us for ever.”

“We shall at all events be separated in the course of a few months,” said Cyrilla; “but I have sufficient reliance on you to wait patiently for better times.”

“And,” he persisted, “suppose these better times were very distant; suppose obstacles apparently insurmountable should be placed between us?”

“I will wait—years—a life long!”

“Will you promise?” cried Zorndorff, with unaccountable eagerness, “will you promise me *that*?”

“What I said yesterday meant it, and you may rely on me. I ask for no assurances, no promises from you; I

trust you implicitly—is it too much to expect you to do the same by me?”

“How in — tolerably rational she is!” exclaimed Zorndorff, turning to Melanie. “She does not love me . . . yet.”

“You are ungrateful,” said Melanie; “can you not perceive that her regard shows itself in acts, not in words?”

“But unfortunately I am by nature suspicious, and nothing but an irrevocable promise can satisfy me.”

“Irrevocable!” repeated Melanie, laughing; “one would almost suppose that you were suggesting a clandestine marriage.”

“I wish I dared do so,” said Zorndorff.

“That would be terrifically romantic,” rejoined Melanie; “but such a thing must not be named, or even thought of for a moment.” And she suddenly rose and put an end to a conference that was taking so dangerous a turn. Her jesting interpretation of his words, however, served to inspire a hope from which nothing could afterwards induce Zorndorff to swerve, and on which he rang the changes, until the idea became familiar to her, and at length formed a frequent subject of discussion.





CHAPTER XVIII.

DURING the ensuing six weeks the strong youthful fancy, and unconscious admiration that Cyrilla felt for Zorndorff became, under her sister's auspices and his unremitting devotion, a passion of that enthusiastic description which, however much cultivation of mind and manners might enable her to conceal it, was powerful enough to blind her judgment, make her dependent on him for happiness, and even threatened to deprive her youth of its hitherto unbroken serenity.

It was the dull season at Exfort; all Melanie's friends and acquaintances began to quit the town: the Bellegardes, with whom she was most intimate, were to visit their grandfather in the south of France; the Vicomtesse de Rubigny to return to Italy with her husband, who was attached to the French legation at one of the minor courts; and the President's arrangements and press of business previous to his journey to Aix confining him almost exclusively to his office,—Melanie, Cyrilla, and Zorndorff were more than ever drawn together, their intercourse less impeded or disturbed than before. An apparently unlimited confidence was established; letters were read aloud, answers discussed, and, finally, three applications for consent to Cyrilla's engagement despatched by the same post to Salzburg. Melanie's letter was perfect, the romance subdued, the praises of her nephew judicious. Zorndorff's short, energetic, and trustful. Cyrilla endeavoured to confine herself to affectionate entreaties; but

deep feeling and painful anxiety were legible between each timid line.

The morning they were to leave Exfort, the President, as usual, waited until after the post hour, deliberately looked over all his letters, and then retired to give some final directions.

"I have just heard from my father," said Zorndorff, approaching Cyrilla; "he is going to Aix—win *him*, and all will go well."

"What must I do to make him like me?"

"Sing for him, read for him, sketch for him, and above all things, laugh and talk as you would to me. You will not find him insensible, though perhaps a little indifferent at first."

"O!" said Cyrilla, a good deal relieved, "I don't think, from this description, I shall be at all afraid of him."

"Your peculiar position just now makes unusual care necessary," said Zorndorff. "His plans for me were similar to your aunt's for you; and he is not a man who makes allowances for weaknesses that interfere with what he considers duties."

"But," said Cyrilla, "there is no duty in this case . . . you are not in any way bound to this Margaret von Sommerfeld . . ."

"No—no—certainly not; but my father feels such compassion for her wretched state of health that he . . ." Here, to Zorndorff's great relief, the President entered the room again; and he added, as if in continuation, "In short, he is a great admirer of your sex, takes their part on all occasions, and I have not the least doubt that you will like him."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked the President.

"My father. I have just been telling Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron that she will see him at Aix. He has desired me to meet him there as soon as I can manage to get away from Exfort."

"I think," said the President, slightly frowning, "it would be better if you went to Berlin. The six months' mourning is at an end, and there is no reasonable cause for further delay."

“Then I must make an *unreasonable* one,” said Zorndorff, with affected unconcern; but, seeing the determined gravity of his uncle, he added, “I can do nothing until I have seen my father again, and must give him time to take his baths in peace before we think of transacting business.”

“In the meantime,” said the President, with a good deal of meaning in his manner, “in the meantime you can get over the paroxysm of admiration of which you once spoke to me, and the sooner you do so now the better. Much as I like your society, I have no wish for it at Aix. You understand me, I know.”

Aix-la-Chapelle was then far from being either a handsome town or particularly pleasant place; but the warm springs of mineral water, for which it has been so long celebrated, made it then, as now, much frequented for some months every year. At the time of the Congress which had been held there in 1818, the President had first seen Melanie; and, after a very short acquaintance, she had become his wife. With a regularity which had pervaded all his movements through life, he had returned to Aix year after year, taking the same walks, observing the same diet, and using the same number of baths, until they had become, from habit, as necessary to the renovation of his strong frame as the relaxation from business was undoubtedly beneficial to his hard-worked mind. It is true, he read the newspapers while in his bath, and wrote several hours every day, but he was no longer absorbed in business; he grew almost cheerful, and even occasionally hazarded something like a jest with his old friend General Zorndorff, who invariably spent the greater part of every day with him.

As Melanie never walked, the President considered it incumbent on him to take Cyrilla out with him; and, after having shown her everything worth seeing in and about the town, from the tomb of Charlemagne and the relics, to the pond of warm salt water, in which the fish flourish instead of being parboiled, she was thenceforward expected daily to ascend the Louisberg, rest for a time on the ter-

race, admire the view, and then return home in precisely the period of time which had been found requisite for the performance of this healthful, pleasant, and exhilarating walk during the three trials necessary to ascertain the fact. It is not improbable that she might have found herself before long in the same situation as the girl in Madame de Genlis' "Palais de la Vérité," who, being condemned to wander perpetually on the most luxuriant green grass, under a sky of unclouded blue, was at first enchanted with the bright prospect, but soon growing weary of it and her walk, wished for any convulsion of nature that would change and terminate it. Cyrilla's companions, however, supplied by their conversation the want of variety in the scenery. The President, though not what is called agreeable, was well informed; the General was both; and the awe Cyrilla had apprehended she should feel in his presence was forgotten, when, instead of the grim-looking warrior she had unconsciously taught herself to expect, his still handsome face and youthful figure met her anxious glance. It seemed as if hard service, more than age, had partially bleached his hair, which, on his head and in his moustachios, grew thick and long, while his dark eyes, clear and expressive as his son's, were even more constantly animated; and the scarcely perceptible shade of red that coloured his sunburnt features, gave an appearance of health and freshness to his whole person.

Cyrilla's task was easy. He had known her father long and well; they had suffered dangers and hardships together; her name interested, her appearance charmed him; and the half playful, half serious efforts which she unreservedly made to please, added to the incessant eulogiums of the President, at length completely fascinated him. There was no endeavour on his part to appear a day younger than his age, there was nothing youthful in his manner, but there was also nothing aged. He had not become garrulous, that most unfailing proof of weakening intellect. He neither spoke of his successes in love nor war. If questioned about his campaigns, he described them as events in which his person was lost sight of altogether; but he had

known all the celebrated men of the last war, and of them he spoke freely enough; and about what he had seen in the different camps and courts where chance had thrown him he was by no means reserved.

Cyrilla's walks on the Louisberg were very pleasant. She sprang lightly on between her companions, at first merely a listener to their conversation, latterly a participator in it. The President thought it necessary occasionally to affect a little parental authority when, complaining of heat, she threw off her scarf or shawl, and let her bonnet hang by its strings on her shoulders. Not so the General. He laughed, seemed to enjoy, and openly encouraged all her childish wilfulness.

One day, on their return, they found Melanie sitting at a table covered with newly arrived letters. Cyrilla's colour changed rapidly as she received the long-expected one from her mother, and retired with it to a distant window. Melanie seemed lost in thought, the President and General so occupied, that for nearly half an hour the silence was unbroken excepting by the occasional rustling of paper or breaking of seals. At length the General observed: "How pleasantly and quickly our time here has passed this year, Wilhelm! Edouard writes that he will join us here, though I scarcely expected him to do so, as he refused last year; and I know he particularly dislikes Aix."

The President looked at Cyrilla. She was gazing into the street, and appeared totally uninterested in what had been said. "All right there at least," he thought.

But Cyrilla had not heard one word.

"He says," continued the General, referring to his letter, "he says he can remain here a week or two, and that he hopes to induce his aunt and her sister to make some excursions with him."

"I shall be delighted," said Melanie, with a faint laugh and embarrassed look, as she moved quickly across the room to Cyrilla, and asked, in a whisper, "Good or bad news?"

"Good—that is, consent; but given reluctantly—O, so reluctantly, that it scarcely deserves the name. There are

a few lines enclosed for you and for him, but the letter seems to have been delayed more than a week in Exfort!"

"Edouard kept it, hoping to bring it to you himself. As, however, he cannot be here until next week, and finds suspense intolerable, he has desired me to write to him directly, but on no account to let either his father or Wilhelm know that I do so."

"I hoped," said Cyrilla, with a sigh, "that there would soon be an end to all this secrecy."

"O, my dear creature, you do not know how poor dear Edouard has become entangled within the last few weeks. He has evidently been too compassionate, and if you do not assist him, I fear he will be sacrificed."

"Sacrificed!"

"Hush; wait until these two men have left the room: you see they are just going."

"Well!" said Cyrilla, as the door closed on them.

"Let me read you part of his letter," said Melanie, her eyes glancing quickly over the closely written pages. "'Accumulated annoyances . . . unsolicited affection . . . cursed feeling of commiseration' . . . no, that's not it . . . But here he says: 'And just when I had reason to hope that I should never hear their odious names mentioned again, I received a letter from old Sommerfeld, to say that he was ill, and would, in all probability, soon follow his son to the grave;—that if his daughter's fortune were twenty times greater than it is, there was no one on whom he would so willingly bestow her and it as on me. My very objection to be enriched by her had so raised me in his opinion, as well as hers, that he joined her in wishing to make the most liberal settlement on me, so that I should in no way feel dependent on either of them.'"

"Very magnanimous!" said Cyrilla, breathing quickly; "these offers seem to have had weight with him, too. You may tell him when you write that he is at liberty to accept them."

"Wait until you hear the rest," said Melanie, and she continued to read:—"I need not tell you that this proposal made no sort of impression on me; but when the old

man added that his unfortunate child had been ill since the time she had last seen me, and that she was at times almost quite insensible for hours, I could not refuse to pity and believe him. I have seen her in that state myself, and the question is now simply, is she or am I to be sacrificed?" Melanie paused, and looked up.

"He seems to forget me altogether!" observed Cyrilla with some bitterness.

"O no; but he imagines you do not care for him as he does for you. You have never in any way betrayed the extent of your regard for him. He asks a proof now: give it him, and all doubts are at an end for ever!"

"He shall have it," cried Cyrilla, with heightened colour and flashing eyes. "I release him from all his vows and promises."

"He desires exactly the contrary," said Melanie, eagerly. "He has requested me to induce you to consent to—a—private—marriage!"

"I dare not, I dare not!" cried Cyrilla, with a look of terror; but in her heart she rejoiced that he gave such a proof of his determination to reject the wealth she knew he so ardently desired to possess. "Dearest Melanie, you cannot advise me to take such a step?"

"You say your mother consents . . ." began Melanie.

"Yes; and she dislikes long engagements, too; but she certainly never thought of anything of this kind, and would never permit it."

"We cannot expect her to trust Edouard as we do. She does not know him yet," said Melanie; "but let me read the rest of his letter to you—'I confess without hesitation that I have not my father's or uncle's stern rectitude of character. I cannot, unmoved, see any woman suffer; and this weakness has been the cause of all my embarrassments. Even idolizing Cyrilla, as you know I do, I will not, cannot answer for myself, if I must submit to the ordeal of a few scenes such as I know await me in Berlin. Nothing but the most solemn engagement—nothing but a previous marriage can enable me to brave them. Use, therefore, all your influence to induce Cyrilla

to consent to my plan. Chance favours us: a young clergyman, a friend of mine, to whom I have just had an opportunity of being useful, is now in Spa, which, you know, is so near Aix that we can go there any day we please. In trusting this young man, we run no risk. I am convinced that we may depend on his secrecy. Tell Cyrilla that my life's happiness is in her hands, and entreat her not to drive me to despair by being inexorable.' ”

Melanie paused, folded up her letter, and then said: “Your answer, Cyrilla; I must write.”

“I cannot consent . . . Melanie,” she added uneasily. “Do you think that Edouard has been quite candid with us? Do you not find this proposal of the Sommerfelds odd—in fact, indelicate, if we may not suppose a—previous engagement?”

“Not at all, my dear,” said Melanie, impatiently, “the people are enormously rich, wish for rank, and take it for granted he must be merely making difficulties to enhance his value. . . . Though you cannot, I *can* imagine him spending hours with the nervous, melancholy sister of his friend, and nothing more natural than that she should take a fancy to him, and determine to indulge it like a spoiled child, as she no doubt is. Come, Cyrilla, relent a little . . . or Edouard may go to Berlin without seeing you!”

“Let him go!” cried Cyrilla, petulantly. “After he has passed his ordeal, as he calls it, I shall have more confidence in him.”

“Are you serious?”

“Perfectly; but he has no idea of going to Berlin. I feel sure he will come here and insist . . . O, how I wish I could go home until all these difficulties were removed! You see he is unreasonable in his demands: no assurances, no promises will satisfy him!”

“He *loves!*” cried Melanie, enthusiastically; “and in your place I could more than pardon: I should rejoice to find him unreasonable! Had Valentin Englmann possessed such energy and ardour, how different would have been my fate; but he only talked of the deprivations to

which I might be subjected, the trials I should have to endure, and himself proposed . . . urged me to yield to the wishes of my family !”

“ I cannot help thinking he was very unselfish,” said Cyrilla.

“ And I cannot help thinking,” rejoined Melanie, “ that it is a great pity you could not make up your mind to marry Rupert. I perceive every day more and more that he was right when he said you would suit each other exactly. The measure of passionless regard which would have perfectly satisfied him will drive poor Edouard to distraction !”

She left the room while uttering the last words ; and the letter which she then wrote brought Zorndorff to Aix immediately. A stormy scene ensued, in which Cyrilla showed more firmness than he had expected ; and he, in consequence, adopted a system of acting but too well calculated to work on the feelings of a youthful and warm heart. He pretended to be offended at her having questioned him again on his connexion with the Sommerfelds ; was indignant about her doubting his word ; and then quarrelled with her in the most decided manner. All intercourse between them ceased. He never by any chance addressed her—avoided her whenever he could do so without rudeness—and gave full play to the naturally melancholy expression of his beautiful countenance. At first Cyrilla was angry ; then she became offended ; at last unhappy. The President began by degrees to perceive a change in the manners of his gay sister-in-law. She seldom saug, no longer made amusing sketches, and complained not unfrequently of fatigue during their walks. Zorndorff never accompanied them after the first day, and had also declined joining any of their excursions in the neighbourhood, although in his letters he had been the first to propose them. The President was sorry for Cyrilla, but highly approved of his nephew’s supposed prudence.

To Cyrilla a continuance of this state of affairs became intolerable. All her efforts to conceal her sufferings from her tormentor were vain. She knew that he read every

feeling of her heart, but he did not apparently triumph in her struggles. He evidently became himself from day to day more depressed.

At length she summoned courage one morning to sit down beside the President, and quietly but resolutely requested him to make arrangements for her immediate return home. While she was still speaking, Zorndorff entered the room, and involuntarily her voice sank, while her colour rose in the presence of the unwished-for auditor. The President paused for more than a minute before he answered: "Of course, of course, my dear child, if you wish it; but you must promise to return to us again in a few months—in a very few months. You have become the life of our house, Cyrilla, and I should like to keep you altogether now."

"You are very kind," she said, with a faint smile, and then added, in a still lower voice: "Mamma, in her last letter, seemed so anxious for my return, that if you could manage it, I should like to leave to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" he exclaimed. "Why, to-morrow you are going to Spa."

"I don't intend to go to Spa."

"Don't you?" said the President, with some surprise; "and yet I remember hearing you say you wished to see the ruins of Franchimont, and that you intended to buy a work-box for your sister." As Cyrilla was silent, he continued: "Melanie will not give up the party to Spa, I fear; but a day more or less is of little importance. We shall return to Exfort the end of this week, and then you can have Madame Ehrhardt from Freilands to travel home with you."

Accustomed to dictate, he considered further discussion needless; and, having looked at his watch, gathered up his papers and left the room. Cyrilla rose precipitately, intending to follow him, but Zorndorff sprang forward, and whispered a few words of such urgent entreaty, that she stopped. Some reproaches followed; then entreaties for forgiveness, if he had offended; finally, a passionate appeal to her heart. Cyrilla hesitated—pardoned—and then—

burst into tears. Zorndorff saw his advantage, and pursued it. Those who have had "love passages" in their lives (and who has not?) know how difficult it is to quarrel again at the very moment of reconciliation; when Zorndorff, with fervid earnestness and tearful eyes, again whispered: "You will go to Spa?" she had not courage to say no, and all her efforts afterwards to moderate his expectations were vain. He left her to make the necessary arrangements with Melanie.

While still standing motionless in a state of painful mental bewilderment, her two elderly friends came to remind her of her promise to walk with them. Almost mechanically, she that day moved on between them, but was so silent and abstracted, that, after a few fruitless efforts to enliven her, they also became taciturn; the thoughts of both centred in her, but were as different as could well be imagined.





CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT are you about, Edouard?" cried the General the next day, when he saw his son rather ostentatiously cramming the pockets of the carriage with books. "What are you about? Was there ever such a dull insensible fellow in this world? One would think you were going to travel with me or your uncle . . . if you can read in such society, I disown you altogether."

"And I adopt him," cried the President, with unusual warmth. "Edouard, you are acting like a man of honour, and I admire and appreciate your conduct more than I can here express; but you understand me."

He did; and as he bent forward, under pretence of assisting his aunt in her search for her note-book, he blushed in that dim, scarcely perceptible manner peculiar to very pale men; but the veins on his temples swelled high and purple at the praise which he felt at that moment he did not deserve in the sense it had been bestowed on him. As they drove off, he consoled himself with the idea, that his unpremeditated quarrel with Cyrilla, and no effort on his part, had, on the present occasion, tended to deceive his uncle.

Spa is about ten leagues from Aix-la-Chapelle, and is situated in the mountains of the Ardennes, occupying a valley round which hills covered with woods form an amphitheatre, and give it various and picturesque environs that tempt the inhabitants to continual excursions. To the well-known ruins of Franchimont the travellers went

at once. They thought they might be questioned about them, or the view from them, and they wished to have the ensuing morning free.

The use which Zorndorff and Cyrilla made of this freedom was to bind themselves by vows as solemn as they were secret. It was at the G eroust ere spring, about two miles from Spa, that they met the clergyman; and in the keeper's house, where he had procured a room for them, the marriage-ceremony was performed; not, however, until Zorndorff had explained at some length to his very dissatisfied, and evidently most unwilling friend, that whatever legal formalities had been omitted from want of time, should be carefully attended to subsequently, and that at all events there was every probability that the ceremony would be performed again at some not very distant period in a more public manner, and in presence of their mutual relations. When they were to *exchange* rings, as is usual in Germany, there was an embarrassed pause. Zorndorff, after a moment's hesitation, drew from the little finger of his left hand a small but very massively set seal-ring, on which his arms were engraved, and placed it on the third finger of Cyrilla's *right* hand (the left is only used to denote a left-handed or unequal marriage), then took from her a small twisted hoop, gave it the place previously occupied by his signet, and murmured, as he did so, the words, "for ever."

After their return to Spa, when speaking of this circumstance, and laughing about having forgotten the mystic sign of eternity, Zorndorff told Cyrilla that at their second marriage he would reclaim *his* ring, but that hers should never leave his finger, and was destined to accompany him to the grave.

"And this second marriage?" cried Melanie, eagerly, "when is it likely to take place?"

"That depends on circumstances over which I have no control," replied Zorndorff, gravely.

"It will not, I hope, be necessary ever to mention what occurred this morning at the G eroust ere," continued Melanie, walking up and down the room uneasily. "Wil-

helm would be furious I am beginning to think it was a very unadvised—hasty act I I wish to heaven I had not consented.”

She felt that she had more than consented—she had promoted. After a long pause she began again: “A painful presentiment of evil is coming over me. Cyrilla your mother Edouard, your father Good gracious, how can you talk in that way, and be happy at such a moment !”

This was addressed to her companions, but they heard her not; seated together on a sofa, they seemed to have no thought but for each other. Cyrilla smiled and blushed; while Zorndorff whispered bright visions of future happiness and assurances that the ensuing two or three years would be more endurable to them both, now that the doubts and anxieties of an uncertain engagement were at an end, and they could enjoy the tranquillizing certainty that, happen what would, they were bound to each other for life. As Melanie approached them, Cyrilla drew her down beside her; while Zorndorff continued talking, totally undisturbed by her presence. She listened, and tried to forget her apprehensions, but in vain; his unusually high spirits alarmed her more and more; she proposed ordering the carriage to return to Aix. He would not listen to her; and when she commenced a half earnest expostulation with Cyrilla, he playfully waved her away, saying, that no one should in future interfere between him and his wife.

Melanie tried to laugh; but tears stood in her eyes as she walked to a window, and watched some black clouds which began to gather over the town, foreboding a thunder-storm. With the first flash of lightning, a light travelling carriage appeared in the street, and dashed furiously on towards the hotel. “Edouard, Edouard,” she exclaimed almost breathlessly, “here is your father, and I do believe your uncle is with him.”

“What the devil has brought them here?” cried Zorndorff, starting up. “Did they say anything to you about intending to come?”

“On the contrary, they both refused, and said nothing would induce them to submit to the examination of their luggage on the frontiers; and yet your father’s carriage is packed as if for a long journey, and your servant that you purposely left at Aix is with him.”

“Then,” said Zorndorff, “he has got letters from those cursed Sommerfelds, who seem determined to hunt me down. Any woman but Margaret would have perceived long ago that I all but—hated her. Cyrilla, dearest, our trials are beginning sooner than I expected; my father is violent, and a storm is now inevitable, but it is unnecessary that you should witness it—I will meet him alone. If he insist on my going with him at once to Berlin, I shall consent; it will be but two days sooner than I intended; and, watched by him and my uncle, as I should be in case I refused, we could enjoy but little of each other’s society.” He left the room by one door, as his father and the President entered by another.

They looked round with some surprise; it was evident they had expected to find him where in fact he had been a few minutes before. The President said something about “business,”—a word which his lips seemed to form from habit; the General asked for his son, and on hearing Melanie’s answer, prepared to seek him. The President drew him aside, and whispered, “Do not be too hasty: though he confessed that he admired, he has so evidently avoided her of late, that I am still inclined to think he has not spoken to her—perhaps she knows nothing at all about the matter; before you see him, let me at least question Melanie.” He turned to his wife, and in his most solemn and severe manner requested her to accompany him into the adjoining room.

Cyrilla looked anxiously towards the General; she knew he liked her, and all her hopes now centered in him. Though aware that she dared not confess what had occurred that morning, she wished him to speak to her about his son; she thought he might be induced to give up his mercenary plans for him, if aware of their mutual attachment, and she now felt that she could acknowledge hers

without reserve. Surely a man who could speak so gently, and look so kindly, must value affection more than money! Cyrilla's furtive glance towards her usually cheerful companion made her heart sink; he appeared to have suddenly grown taller, as with head erect, his arms folded, his brows contracted, his lips firmly pressed together, he impatiently paced the long apartment, stopping however, occasionally, to fix his dark searching eyes upon her face. There was something terrific in his glance, something which she did not understand; but she recoiled before it and felt alarmed. Perhaps he observed this, for the firmness of his step relaxed; he stopped more frequently, and at length said, "I am sorry you have seen me in this state of irritation; I fear it may eradicate any more agreeable impressions I may have been so fortunate as to have made on you, during our six weeks' acquaintance."

"You have made me a little afraid of you, I confess," answered Cyrilla, attempting to smile; "I am not at all courageous—a loud word, or an angry look, intimidates me at once."

"That is the very last thing in the world I should wish to do," said the General, still standing erect before her. "I have received letters of a most unpleasant, most painful description, but—but—if you have nothing to do with this unfortunate affair—or if you are only unconsciously the cause, why, I have no right—I have no wish—in fact, you cannot change your nature, and become disagreeable instead of charming, or ugly instead of—of—pshaw!" and he again commenced his walk.

"I have no wish to be either disagreeable or ugly," observed Cyrilla, demurely looking up at him.

"To know you well, and not to—like—you, is impossible," began the General after a pause.

"I am very glad to hear you say so," rejoined Cyrilla, once more breathing freely; "there is no one I have ever taken so much pains to please as you."

"Indeed! I feared it was the vanity inherent to man, which sometimes made me imagine this: my natural understanding refused to believe that one like you could feel any interest in an old soldier such as I am."

“ I never saw you look old until just now,” said Cyrilla ; “ and it was not exactly old either, but terrible. I think you have made me even more afraid of you than I am of the President, and yesterday I could have spoken to you as I would to—to—Melanie.”

“ I wish,” he said, leaning over the end of the sofa while his features by degrees began to resume their usual expression, “ I wish you would forget having seen me angry.”

“ I cannot, until you have been for some time quite yourself again.”

He paused, and seemed to deliberate. “ I do not quite understand you,” he began slowly ; “ may I ask you a question or two ?”

“ As many as you please,” answered Cyrilla, hoping that at last he was about to name his son.

“ You said just now, that you had taken trouble to please me. You did so, perhaps, and now tell me so without reserve, because I am old enough to be—your father.”

Cyrilla blushed and turned away her head.

“ And you sang all that old-fashioned music I brought you—merely to humour the fancies of an *old* man ?”

There was something so gentle, so resigned, in the half-sigh with which this was said, that Cyrilla looked up with some surprise, and said, “ I never thought about your age ; I sang whatever and whenever you desired it, because I wished you to like me.”

“ You would not, however, be so candid,” observed the General, smiling, “ if I were a score of years younger ?”

“ Perhaps not.”

“ And suppose,” he continued, “ suppose, besides liking, I were to admire you as if I were that score of years younger ?”

“ Like and admire me as much as you please,” said Cyrilla, “ but never again look at me as you did just now !”

“ *Never !*” exclaimed the General, and snatching her hand, he pressed it to his lips ; a moment after, it seemed to turn to a torpedo within his grasp—he gazed at it as if all his faculties had become benumbed. Cyrilla saw that

his eyes were fixed on the ring she had that morning received from Zorndorff; she saw that he recognised it, and was not sorry that the unusual form of the shield and heavy setting spared her the pain of a partial explanation which she rather desired than otherwise. To remove any lingering doubts, he raised her hand so as to let the light fall on the seal, and immediately perceived his own arms. "That ring," he said, slowly, "has been given you by Edouard—my son."

Cyrilla did not speak, and he continued, "I fear, I greatly fear, he did not tell you how it came into his possession, or you would have preferred any other gift, perhaps have refused to accept of any one from him."

Cyrilla looked up inquiringly.

"You have most probably never heard the name of Margaret von Sommerfeld?"

"Count Zorndorff spoke of her as a person that *you* very much wished him to marry : . ." began Cyrilla.

"A person that *he* very much wished to marry," said the General, sternly; "a person whose affections he sought and gained many years ago, while still a student. At that time he wished to marry; but I feared his giving up his profession, and her father equally dreaded his want of steadiness: it was therefore postponed; but after a long and dangerous illness, from which she is scarcely yet recovered, a solemn betrothal took place, and *that* was the ring she gave him in the presence of all her assembled relations. The successive deaths of a sister and two brothers have hitherto prevented the fulfilment of this engagement, but her father is now dying, and wishes for the marriage without further delay. Henceforward procrastination becomes treachery towards a woman whose affection has been undeviating so many years—who has stood all the various trials to which he has not scrupled to subject her, and whose life, they say, depends on his future conduct to her. What *his* intentions or wishes may be now, I shall not inquire; he is bound in honour to make Margaret his wife—and his wife she shall be," he added again, walking up and down the room, "his wife she shall be before many weeks are over."

Cyrilla, completely confounded by this lucid statement, the truth of which she did not for a moment doubt, sat stupefied, until he pronounced the last words. Their dire import to her, however, roused her at once, and, clasping her hands, she stammered: "But he does not care for her; he does not like her!"

"He *did* care for her, or pretended to do so, which is the same thing in the eyes of the world. Her brothers are dead, her father dying, she has no near relation to call him to account; but *I* have promised to be her guardian, and I have never yet broken a promise, nor shall a son of mine do so. I would rather," he added, vehemently, "I would rather see him, with all his youth, talent, and beauty, stretched on his bier, than that a shade of dishonour should pass over our house!"

He left her, and she sat in a sort of stupor, she knew not how long. Her sister and the President entered the room; she heard the former reproach her husband for having kept her in ignorance of so important a circumstance as her nephew's engagement, and heard the President answer:

"I should have told you long ago, Melanie, had you been as reasonable as you are a clever woman. Your actions are irreproachable, but your theories are of so fantastic and romantic a description, that I feared when you discovered that prudence more than love had directed Edouard's choice, you might have endeavoured to disgust him with the prospect of comfort and affluence that awaited him."

"Comfort and affluence!" repeated Melanie, disdainfully. "Say, rather, that you and his father wish him to sell himself for gold!"

"He chose for himself," rejoined the President, "of his own free will; what his motives were I can only surmise. His father is not mercenary, and would never have required him to improve his fortune by marriage; but having pledged himself as he has done, he has now only the alternative of honour or dishonour."

Melanie approached Cyrilla, and whispered: "I have confessed nothing; for my sake, for heaven's sake, be silent, and trust to Edouard."

Cyrilla bent her head, without attempting to speak.

The General and his son entered the room immediately afterwards. Never had their resemblance to each other been so apparent as at the moment when, pale and agitated, they both came towards Cyrilla to take leave. The former murmured a few scarcely intelligible words, and then turned to the President and Melanie. Zorndorff stood still and contemplated Cyrilla, as she sat, or rather reclined on the sofa, pale, her eyes cast down, and trembling in all the apprehension of the explosion of family ire which she momentarily expected.

“Come,” cried the General, hastily; “delay is worse than useless now.”

“I cannot leave her so,” cried Zorndorff. “Let me speak to her; I ask but a few minutes—alone,” he added, looking round the room, “or at least only in presence of my aunt.”

His father moved towards the door, as if to comply with his request. The President stopped him: “Edouard can have nothing to say which we may not hear; he has evidently been less candid than he ought to have been with Cyrilla. Let him express his regret and . . .”

“Ungenerous!” exclaimed Zorndorff, angrily. “I might insist . . . but no matter . . . your presence may be a restraint to her—to me it shall be none. Cyrilla, dearest Cyrilla!” he cried, seating himself beside her in the very place he had occupied before his father’s arrival. “Will you endeavour to believe that my ungovernable love has alone induced me to deceive you about this most unfortunate engagement? You must remember how long I avoided you!—how I struggled with my traitorous inclinations!”

Cyrilla remembered but too well.

“You will not answer? Give me at least your hand in token of forgiveness.”

The hand was as cold as ice, and some tears from Zorndorff’s eyes fell upon it. “Speak, Cyrilla,” he said, in a voice choked by emotion. “I prefer reproaches to this silence.”

"Tell me . . . what . . . I *may* say," she murmured, slowly, "and I will say it . . . if I can."

Zorndorff felt all the meaning of these words, and answered, hurriedly: "Say that you forgive—that you will endeavour to forget that I have deceived you; say that you will still rely on me, and believe in my unalterable affection."

"She may forgive you, Edouard," said his father, stepping forward; "but to your affection she can have no further claim."

"Speak, Cyrilla . . ." cried Zorndorff, beseechingly, without appearing to have heard his father's words.

"I . . . forgive . . ." faltered Cyrilla.

"And you will rely on me, no matter how much appearances may be against me. You will believe that in heart and soul I am yours, let what will occur?"

Again his father attempted to interfere. Zorndorff waved his hand impatiently, and continued, in a low impassioned voice: "Cyrilla, you once said that you would wait years—a *life*—if necessary; these were your words—your own words! Promise, oh promise me that now!"

"She shall not!" cried the President, coming towards them with a frown of displeasure. "She shall not! How dare you ask her to speculate on death—to rejoice over a grave? Thoughts less defined than these, Edouard, have led to crimes of the deepest die."

"Promise—promise," reiterated Zorndorff, still more vehemently, as he drew her unresisting form towards him.

"Can I do otherwise?" she whispered. "Am I not bound to you for life?"

"Cyrilla," began the President, severely, "I know not how to express my astonishment at conduct so unlike what I expected from you . . . if these whispered words were indeed the promise he . . ."

"Enough—enough," cried Zorndorff, starting from the sofa; "delay is torture now—let us go."

He left the room, followed by his father and uncle. Cyrilla clasped her hands, and sat motionless, until roused

by the sound of a departing carriage; then she pressed her hand over her eyes, looked round the room, approached her sister, who was sitting at a little distance, and fixing her eyes on her earnestly, she said, slowly, "Is not this like a dreadful dream? to see, and hear, and sit spell-bound, not daring to speak! How will all this end?"

"Heaven knows," answered Melanie, despondingly. "Wilhelm says that the engagement is of a peculiarly binding description; that at Edouard's own request papers have been signed and countersigned, and I know not what all! Edouard's silence may be excused on the plea of headstrong passion dreading a check; but Wilhelm's systematic secrecy towards me is unpardonable."

"What was it he said about death and a grave?" asked Cyrilla, anxiously.

"I don't know, dear; I was so afraid that Edouard, in a moment of irritation, would confess your marriage, that I paid little attention to any one but him; most probably it was something about that woman. . . . Wilhelm says she is in a very precarious state of health."

"Perhaps he meant that she might die . . . and if she should, may not I be indirectly the cause? O Melanie," she added, kneeling beside her sister, and resting her head on the arm of her chair, "pray with me, pray for me, for you have helped to lead me into this temptation."





CHAPTER XX.



YRILLA returned home. The disastrous occurrences just related had so shaken her reliance on her sister's judgment that she felt a feverish impatience to be with her mother, an intense longing to confide in her, and a determination to confess without reserve all that had happened since they had parted; but when she again saw the emaciated form, hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes of her parent, fear took possession of her mind, and she no longer possessed the necessary courage for the confession of an error which began to assume the appearance of a crime, now that she was deprived of Melanie's plausible arguments to palliate it.

Yet no material change had taken place either in the Baroness Carl's health or appearance. For years she had suffered from a chronic disease of the heart; for years she had known that she was dying. She had often spoken of it, and her children had, as is usual in such cases, thought her hypochondriacal, and at last had learned to listen with a sort of melancholy patience to the admonitions and directions which she frequently gave as if solemnly dictating her will. A few months' absence had removed from Cyrilla's eyes the veil of habit. She had become conscious of the slow progressive work of decay which had formerly escaped her notice; and Fernanda's quiet manner of listening and answering when her mother spoke of death now appeared to her perfectly incomprehensible. It was in vain her sister assured her, when they were alone,

that their mother had suffered less during the past summer than she had done for years,—that she had even grown stronger. Cyrilla saw death in every feature, in every languid movement; and whenever the Baroness Carl made the most distant allusion to it, she lost all command of herself, and frequently was obliged to rush out of the room.

Thus compelled to keep her unfortunate secret, Cyrilla had never been able to show any of Zorndorff's letters to either her mother or sister; but though evidently surprised, they refrained from making any remark that might pain or embarrass her. When, however, these letters from week to week became less satisfactory, containing mere vows of unalterable affection, mixed with some vague hopes of better times, and all reference to the Sommerfeld family was carefully avoided, Cyrilla could scarcely conceal her daily increasing anxiety. The short, despairing, incoherent lines that afterwards reached her from time to time made her suppose that a crisis was near, and each letter was opened in the expectation that it would at least put an end to a state of suspense that was becoming quite intolerable.

Her aunt, who had passed the summer in one of those beautifully situated villas in the immediate vicinity of Salzburg, returned to the town when the weather became cold. She found Cyrilla dispirited and looking very pale; questioned her a good deal about Rupert, Freilands, and the Lindesmars, especially Virginie; and then, while arranging in their usual places the china figures, flacons, and monsters that invariably accompanied her to and from the country, she gave her a succinct account of the officers of the newly arrived regiment, who had all been presented to and had visited her directly after their arrival, and was not a little provoked at the apparent apathy of her hearer. Even the intelligence that Rupert's friend, Count Glaneck, had remained as colonel of the said regiment, and that he now came very often to see her, seemed neither to cause surprise nor interest.

The reader may perhaps be more inclined to think it

extraordinary that Count Glaneck, who, the year before, had made Polyak's *liaison d'amitié* a subject of constant derision—who had not scrupled to banter him even in the presence of Rupert—should now, in a manner scarcely comprehensible to himself, have completely taken his place, and become as invulnerable as his predecessor had been to the arrows of ridicule. It so happened that his slight acquaintance of a year with the Baroness had given him a right to choose his own time for visiting her; and, after long procrastination, he, one fine summer's evening, when on his way home from Hellbrunn, turned his horse into the orchard and grass garden through which the short approach to her villa had been made. Dogs and servants were lounging about the door, and one of each guided him, not into but round the house, to a small additional building, one side of which, altogether composed of glass, looked out on the beautiful range of mountains towards Hallein. He ascended a few stone steps, and found himself in a small apartment, with gay chintz-covered furniture; at the furthest end of which, behind a tea-table, sat the Baroness, apparently engaged in a very animated conversation with a well-educated parrot, which, perched on her finger, nibbled the almonds from a cake which she held towards it, and then, putting its head to one side, inquisitively eyed the intruder. Colonel Glaneck was a tall, large man; his white dragoon uniform, his position before the light, and the smallness of the room, making him appear even taller and larger than usual. His hair was mud-coloured, his features irregular, and none of them handsome; but the expression of his countenance, nevertheless, most agreeable, there was so much imperturbable repose and quiet good-humour in it.

His reception was neither warm nor cold. The Baroness spoke to him, and then to her parrot; gave him a cup of tea, and then held a macaroon to Poll. It may be remembered that she rather disliked him than otherwise; and had he, in the present instance, been accompanied by two or three of the officers of his regiment, she would undoubtedly have given any of them the preference, and might still have

continued to entertain an unreasonable prejudice against a man with whom she was, in fact, still unacquainted. But she had been several hours alone, was extremely fond of talking, and though he was rather dull—that is, in the best acceptation of the word, meaning “not exhilarating, not delightful,”—he was by no means stupid, and could let himself be entertained as well as any man in Christendom,—no slight praise, if properly considered. The Baroness required nothing more. She talked, he listened with attention; she jested, he was amused, and showed that he was so. The evening wore away, and it was almost dark when he rose to take leave. She accompanied him to the stone steps, and, while pointing out and naming the different mountains, she gave him time to admire her beautiful arm, necessarily stretched to its fullest extent. She gave him also a commission to her jeweller’s, which obliged him to return the next day. . . . He came earlier, remained to dinner, drove with her to Aigen, braved all the laughing salutations of his friends on the crowded bridge and quay, if the good-humoured smile that accompanied the raising of a couple of fingers to his temples may be so called; and, finally, having discovered that a few hours every day could be pleasantly spent in a room redolent of fresh flowers, possessing a diversified and extensive view, with a person who was willing to accept him as listener and companion, he quietly performed the very few attentions required, received all that were offered, and yielded without reserve to the novelty of a position which, contrasting as it did so advantageously with the somewhat boisterous mirth of his companions during the last year, suited in an unusual degree the tranquil indolence of his disposition. The Baroness’s removal to Salzburg made no change in his habits. Like Polyak, he considered her nieces as pleasant acquisitions, and divided his attentions in precisely the same satisfactory manner among them. Though not very observant, he discovered before long that Cyrilla was pre-occupied and indifferent—in short, totally unlike what he recollected her having been the year before; and at length chose to make this his discovery the theme

of a morning conversation. Always extremely communicative on every subject that did not immediately concern herself, the Baroness informed him of the whole story of Rupert's perverseness, told him how Cyrilla had been sent to Exfort that her cousin might see her, how she had also gone to Freilands with the Falkensteins, and they had imagined everything would end satisfactorily. "And now," she concluded, "I feel convinced that she is attached to my nephew in that provoking sentimental sort of way peculiar to girls of her age, but which has made her quite dull and useless to me, and will not at all tend to recommend her to Rupert's notice, should he come here again. Perhaps, however, a few balls and sledging parties may make her think less of him, which would be just as well, you know, until he has definitely made up his mind about her."

"I don't wonder at her liking him; he is the most good-humoured pleasant fellow I ever met," observed Glaneck.

"He was very popular here," said the Baroness; "but, for my part, I have always found him unmanageable, and, with respect to Cyrilla, obstinate beyond all conception."

"None but very indolent men let other people choose wives for them," said Colonel Glaneck, laughing. "I should submit to a thing of that kind better than Adlerkron, I suspect."

"That reminds me of something I intended to tell you," rejoined the Baroness. "Do you know the people here are beginning to say that you have taken a fancy to my niece Fernanda?"

"Indeed!"

"Now she is a very good sensible girl," continued the Baroness; "but, as your friend, I must inform you that a part of her dower will be an invalid mother and an elderly and very tyrannical *femme de chambre*!"

"Better none at all," said the Colonel, quietly.

"O, it is small enough—scarcely worth naming, for her father was a most thoughtless extravagant man, spent his own fortune and as much of his wife's as she allowed him;

so my nieces are extremely ill off, though they and their mother keep up appearances in such a wonderful manner."

"Greatly to their credit," said Colonel Glaneck.

"Perhaps so, if they were not so insufferably proud. I never much liked my sister-in-law, at all events. It was quite a mistake her not having been a schoolmistress, or something of that sort!"

"I believe she has been a most exemplary mother?" he observed, half inquiringly.

"Yes—there is no denying that—few girls sing, paint, and dance so well as my nieces! Yes—she certainly quite devoted herself to their education!"

"For which we never can be sufficiently grateful," said Fernanda, coming from a distant window where she had been writing music. "Count Glaneck," she added, "here is the Barcarole you wished to have for your band . . ."

"O, thank you; but the Spanish song you promised?"

"I have not time—I—I cannot remain longer absent from—my invalid mother."

"She has heard our conversation," said the Baroness, as Fernanda left the room; "I had quite forgotten that she was within hearing."

"So had I—and yet we were speaking to her not half an hour ago."

"We do not generally speak so loud as to be audible at that distance," said the Baroness, "but I suppose her sister's name caught her attention."

"Do you think she will repeat what she has heard?" asked Colonel Glaneck.

"Most undoubtedly, and if she had remained quiet she would have had more to relate. I disliked my sister-in-law for a variety of reasons, but most especially for the admonitions and advice with which she favoured me about eighteen or twenty years ago; and for the extraordinary influence that she gained over her brothers-in-law, so that they both, to the last days of their lives, were possessed with the idea that a daughter of hers must be the most desirable wife for Rupert. This plan now coincides with some of my own.—I wish to provide for Cyrilla, so that

when my sister-in-law dies I may be able to take Fernanda to reside altogether with me."

"You will probably adopt her?"

"By no means, as I do not know whether or not I may continue to like her as I do now—I—a—only thought of making her my companion."

"A very agreeable and accomplished one she will be," observed Colonel Glaneck.

"I think she will, and then her being so near a relation removes all difficulties about her going out with me, which is particularly pleasant, you know; and though she is not at all pretty, she contrived some way or other to make herself liked here last year, and always found people to dance with, so that I was not at all bored with her."

"I cannot help admiring your candour," said Colonel Glaneck, slightly smiling; "others intending to act as you will do, would have endeavoured to make a merit of it."

The Baroness did not quite understand him; she was too thoroughly selfish to be conscious of it, and after a short pause, she added, as if to remove any doubts of her motives,—“Cyrilla, you know, will certainly marry in the course of a few years either Rupert or some one else; but there is no danger of anything of that kind for Fernanda—no one will propose for her to whom I may not easily object!”

Colonel Glaneck rose with even more than his usual quiet gravity, refused the customary invitation to dinner, but promised to meet her at the theatre, and then walked thoughtfully down the stairs.

When he reached the last step of the staircase, he looked round for his groom, turned into the yard, and not finding him there, had recourse to the porter's bell; but before he rang he paused to watch a postman who just then entered the house. The unconscious messenger of joy or woe half whistled as he sorted a packet of letters and moved towards the apartments of the Baroness Carl, which were on the right side of the entrance. An elderly *femme de chambre* opened the door. Colonel Glaneck knew instinctively that she was the “very tyrannical,” although not a trace of that

quality was discernible in the long, pale, almost melancholy countenance which immediately assumed an expression of deep interest as she received the letter from the hurrying postman, who, with a nod and the words, "For your young lady as usual," sprang down the three steps and disappeared.

"My horse!" said Colonel Glaneck; and the porter, after a look of feigned surprise, turned to some servants who were in his room, repeated the words, then answered: "Yes, Colonel—directly, Colonel"—and retired again into his room, whence, however, instead of the expected groom, a boy soon after darted forth and ran down the street. Quite aware that he was an hour earlier than usual, Colonel Glaneck good-naturedly found it not only pardonable but very natural that his servant should get tired of waiting and go off; perhaps he might himself have done the same, had he not feared it might be supposed that he was angry,—a state of being in which he seldom indulged and never wished to appear; so in an absent sort of way he amused himself playing with one of the Baroness's cross dogs, until the breathless groom returned and pantingly began to inform him that the horses were well off in a stable appropriated exclusively to them,—“a stable in which Count Polyak's horses . . .”

“Come, come, make haste—I have waited long enough,” cried Colonel Glaneck with some impatience and a slight increase of colour.

A few minutes more and he rejoiced in a delay which enabled him to be of use in a most unexpected manner, and eventually turned his thoughts and kindest feelings into a new channel.





CHAPTER XXI.

FERNANDA had no intention whatever of repeating her aunt's remarks to her mother. Their physician had said that mental inquietude would be injurious, and violent emotion of any kind might be dangerous to her: even in the opening and shutting of doors the greatest attention had latterly become necessary, and Fernanda's quick decided movements had by degrees changed to the slowest and stealthiest that she could acquire. Had she found her mother dozing on the sofa, as she expected, it is probable she might have spoken to Cyrilla about Rupert, and have recommended her to disabuse their aunt's mind on that subject the first convenient opportunity; but, instead of sleeping, the Baroness Carl was sitting in an unusually upright posture, and was evidently in a state of considerable nervous excitement. When her daughter entered the room, she took a long breath, and exclaimed:

"Dear creature, what a palpitation you have given me! I thought when you rang that the postman had come; and, though Cyrilla has not told us, I know she has been expecting a letter the last week or ten days!"

Cyrilla, who had been reading aloud, looked up with tearful eyes, and said earnestly: "You cannot imagine with what anxiety I expect this next letter. I hope I may show it to you, and then at last there will be an end to a want of confidence which I know has shocked you."

"Do not mistake me, Cyrilla. I am sorry to see you so

uneasy, so silent, and changed; but I have no wish to read your letters until you *wish* to show them to me."

"Wish! oh how I long to show them to you! If I were sure that there was no danger of your having one of those suffocating palpitations . . . if you could only promise me not to be alarmed or agitated . . ."

"A few years ago I could, under any circumstances, have made such a promise; but for me that time of strength is past—gone for ever," she answered, with a deep sigh. "I have hitherto consoled myself with the idea that, after all, there can be nothing in the letters that I cannot imagine, or do not already know. The impediments to your marriage appear to me, it is true, rather chimerical. Count Zorndorff is not rich, but the interest which his uncle may have promised to use for his preferment will scarcely be withheld because he has chosen to share it with you."

"But, mamma, you always seem to forget that the President wishes him to marry a woman of large fortune who is now in Berlin."

"No, I have not forgotten it; but relations so often wish these things without producing the desired results, that I have learned to consider wishes next to nothing. You are not perhaps aware, that years ago both your uncles, and, until very lately, your aunt and I, wished that you should marry your cousin Rupert."

Cyrilla showed none of the surprise her mother expected. She bent her head over her book, and murmured something of Rupert having told her so.

"You seem to have been on very good terms, and to have spoken very unreservedly to each other," observed her mother. "I find it difficult to understand your mutual indifference . . . still more so your preference for Count Zorndorff, as, from various trifling occurrences that you have carelessly related to me, I cannot help thinking Rupert infinitely more amiable than he is!"

"I imagined you too just to judge any one from trifling occurrences," said Cyrilla, reproachfully.

"It is the best—the surest means of judging correctly,"

answered her mother. "On great or important occasions people deliberate, and not unfrequently balance their selfish inclinations against the applause of the world; but in the everyday trifling occurrences of life, when subject to little blame and less praise, the true character and inclinations show themselves without reserve."

"O, I never thought about all that," said Cyrilla, smiling. "You must not expect me to be wise like you or Fernanda for the next ten years at least."

"Are you," said her mother with some hesitation,— "Are you *quite* sure that Count Zorndorff's personal beauty did not influence you more than it ought to have done? Melanie's description of him, and that picture which he sent you"

At this moment the bell rang, and Cyrilla started up eagerly, joyfully,—hope ever in sanguine minds like hers suggesting future happiness, till chased by stern reality. Before breaking the seal of her letter, she stooped down and lightly kissed the already half-averted cheek of her mother, who, unwilling to embarrass her by an appearance of unusual observation, turned to Fernanda, and began to speak on some uninteresting subject with forced composure. The sound of audibly short-drawn breathing soon, however, made her look anxiously towards Cyrilla. She saw her standing with her eyes rivetted on the letter, while her whole frame trembled violently. Her respiration quickly changed to a succession of convulsive sighs; and at length, after looking wildly round her, she threw herself into a chair, and burst into a passion of tears of such overwhelming violence that her sister sprang towards her, while her mother, rapidly changing colour, slowly rose, and, grasping the intervening table for support, extended her hand and demanded the letter.

"No, no, no, no!" cried Cyrilla vehemently.

"Give me the letter," repeated her mother, in the voice of quiet authority, which Cyrilla had not forgotten, though she had not heard it for years,— "Give me the letter: this is something which I must . . . and ought to know."

She took it, crushed and blotted with tears, from her daughter's hand, and read,—

“Ere this can possibly reach you, Melanie will have told you all. My uncle himself had the consideration to propose her being the bearer of the fatal intelligence. You have heard, then, of my breach of faith and loss of honour. You know that while my heart and vows belonged to you, I have in the most public manner become the wretched husband of Margaret von Sommerfeld. That I have so acted in order to save her life, I hope you will believe: my crime is great enough without the imputation of motives of sordid interest being added to it. I dare not ask your forgiveness; but venture to remind you that you once said you *‘would wait years—a life!’* These words are now my last, my only hope.—ZORNENDORFF.”

“This is a hard trial, my poor child,” said her mother, slowly approaching her; “but,” she added with apparent difficulty of utterance,—“but . . . no . . . uncommon . . . one.”

Cyrilla knew the contrary, and yielded to a fresh paroxysm of grief. Her mother's arms were thrown round her, and she heard some unintelligible words murmured in her ear, while returning the embrace with all the fervour of utter despair. It was some time before she perceived the relaxation of the grasp, the drooping of the head, the gradual sinking of her mother to the very ground. Her exclamation of alarm made Fernanda look up from Zornendorff's letter, which she was reading, and rush towards her; but when, between them, the emaciated sufferer had been placed on a sofa, the still flushed face, distorted features, and slightly protruding tongue, made them instantly aware that it was no common fainting-fit. As Cyrilla began to apply all the simple remedies within her reach, Fernanda, more alarmed than she had ever been in all her life, sought Justine, and having given her a few hurried directions, ran towards the porter's apartment, and was endeavouring breathlessly to make the phlegmatic,

deaf old man comprehend the necessity of going instantly for their physician, when Colonel Glaneck joined her, and in a moment understood what had happened: requesting her to trust the commission to him, he mounted his horse and rode impetuously down the street.

Short as was the time which intervened before he returned—to Fernanda and Cyrilla it appeared an eternity. The slight indications which their mother had given of returning consciousness had altogether ceased; a rigid placidity seemed to steal over her features, as by degrees they regained their usual position. Unremittingly and with unwearied care, every remedy, rendered familiar by long practice, was tried; nor were they all exhausted when the well-known voice of Dr. Paur changed the undefined fears into hopes equally undefined, but buoyant—irrepressible as hopes in such cases always are.

During the half-hour of anxious expectation that ensued, Colonel Glaneck, deeply interested in all he had seen and heard, and hoping he might again in some way make himself useful, walked up and down the little ante-room, usually occupied by Justine, wondering a good deal at the unbroken silence that prevailed in the adjoining apartments. At length he heard the sound of a carriage entering the usually quiet street—a faint distant blast of a horn—accelerated motion—a rumbling—clattering—then the heavy entrance-gates grated on their hinges, and, with a noise that seemed to cause vibration in the house itself, the Countess Falkenstein's carriage rolled under the archway. A large bell, close to Colonel Glaneck, was violently rung, and, before he had time to open the door, Melanie already stood before it. With a precipitation most unusual to her, she hurried forward, and was about to pass on without a glance or word of inquiry, when it occurred to him that he ought to prepare her in some way for what she was likely to witness in her stepmother's apartments. He stopped her, and began an explanation; but no sooner had he pronounced the word "letter" than she interrupted him, exclaiming—

"What letter?—from whom?"

“I have not the most remote idea: I supposed it was from you, and that you had communicated the death of some friend or relation.”

“Too late! too late! O that I had arrived an hour earlier!” she cried, rushing past him into the house.

Dr. Paur had just turned away from the bed of death (for such it proved to be) as Melanie entered. “I have tried everything, in order to satisfy your mind,” he said to Fernanda; “but life was probably extinct even before you could have sent for me. I always feared her death would be sudden—it generally is in cases like hers.”

Melanie sank on a chair in speechless horror.

“She has been spared much suffering,” continued Dr. Paur; “and knowing, as we do, how well prepared she was to die, such a death may be called a blessing. To the surviving family it is, indeed, a hard trial,” he added, looking compassionately towards the youthful orphans, who were endeavouring to stifle their sobs in the pillows that supported their mother’s remains.

Melanie’s presence and sympathy proved an incalculable consolation to her sisters. She mourned with them, that of all remedies the most efficacious in cases of bereavement, and authorized by the highest example; but while Fernanda slowly appeared to become partially resigned to the loss of the being she had loved best on earth, Cyrilla seemed to sink into a state of complete despondency. The shock of her mother’s sudden death had blunted the keenness of her perception of Zorndorff’s perfidy, as the pain of a greater wound causes a lesser (even if more dangerous) to be for a time unheeded. A few distracting words of explanation, however, attempted by Melanie, had acted like a probe, and renewed all her anguish. Then it became evident that their consternation was only equalled by their helplessness. Melanie talked wildly of separations and divorces; and Cyrilla tried to understand, but at last, complaining of confusion of ideas, she had given her Zorndorff’s letter, saying, that she would speak about it and him as soon as she was able to think calmly and with less difficulty. That time was farther distant than she sup-

posed. The day of the interment, she was unable to leave her bed, though, to Fernanda's great uneasiness, she frequently sat up, and, with a flushed countenance, talked in an incoherent manner; but what one sister imagined delirium was to the other but too intelligible, when Cyrilla tightly clasped Melanie's hand and exclaimed: "Oh tell me that I am not bound to him for life! Say that it was a dream,—that dreadful day at Spa!"

Melanie bent over her and whispered: "Dearest love, you are betraying yourself and me in a most unnecessary manner."

"But *she* says I never was at Spa," cried Cyrilla, pointing impatiently to Fernanda, who stood anxiously watching her. "She says I only went to Aix with you!"

"Most probably," whispered Melanie, "you have never to her spoken of Spa."

"Do not answer her," said Fernanda, in a low voice; "it is quite evident she does not know what she is saying."

"You think me delirious," cried Cyrilla, starting up eagerly: "I am not; I am only a little—a very little confused. Is he," she continued, turning abruptly to Melanie, "is he *my* husband,—or—or that other woman's?"

"We will talk about that when you are more composed, Cyrilla."

"But you know we were married . . . you remember the day in Spa?"

"Yes, yes . . . don't talk about it now."

"And you saw the letter he wrote me? It was that letter, Melanie, that killed my mother . . . Can I be the wife of her murderer?"

"No, dear," said Fernanda, soothingly; "the letter has made you free again, and you have now only to forget."

"*Only* to forget!" repeated Cyrilla; "but I tell you," she added passionately, "that I cannot forget—and were I to try, this ring—this odious ring would remind me of him . . . of Spa . . . and . . . and the man with the long scar on his face! Look! I see him quite distinctly now—standing near the window in his long surplice!"

"Who? where?" cried Melanie, turning very pale.

“ There ! . . . No ! . . . it is some one else, now . . . it is Edouard . . . but he is looking at you, and not at me . . . Speak to him, Melanie . . . speak to him . . . ”

“ This is too dreadful ! ” cried Melanie, releasing her hand. “ Fernanda, I cannot stay with her if she talk in this way . . . there is something unearthly in the room—I feel it, though the sight is denied me.”

“ It is my mother,” murmured Cyrilla, as she fell back on her pillows ; “ it is my mother . . . but she looks young . . . just like Fernanda.”

“ This is fever,” said Fernanda, sorrowfully. “ Surely, Melanie, you cannot attach any importance to such ravings ? ”

“ I cannot help it—I am sure she has seen something ; and that this house is haunted, I have not the least doubt. So unceasing and unearthly were the noises in my room last night, that, instead of sleeping, I was obliged to sit up, and leave the large lamp burning ! ”

“ The furniture is new, and made of unseasoned wood,” replied Fernanda ; “ and, when it splits, the unexpected noise in the silence of the night is disagreeable, as I know from experieuce. I wish Dr. Paur were come ! I sent for him an hour ago ! ”





CHAPTER XXII.



YRILLA'S illness was long and dangerous ; three weeks of unconsciousness were followed by as many of passive weakness ; and even when her mind began to regain its activity, she remained for hours silent, abstracted, and apparently unconscious of the presence of her sisters, even when on the subject of religion their conversation approached the verge of argument. Fernanda, strong in her orthodoxy, could not endure any attempt to explain the mysteries of Christianity ; she contended that since Providence ordained there should be mysteries, the endeavour of the unlearned to solve them was incompatible with true piety or common sense, and the same efforts on the part of the learned only led to confusion of ideas or unsatisfactory hypotheses. Melanie, whose religion strongly partook of the visionary bias of her mind, could not induce her sister to tolerate, even for a moment, the mental excursions to other planets in which she herself so frequently indulged, or to listen with patience to her various dissertations on the religion of the Egyptians, whose doctrines of the transmigration of souls and tutelar geniuses had irresistible attraction for her exuberant fantasy.

Their discussions were frequently interrupted by Colonel Glaneck's visits. He came regularly every day ; sometimes saw Melanie, at others Fernanda, and though he spoke little, and remained but a short time, they were always glad to see him, and grateful for the interest he seemed to take in Cyrilla's welfare. From the time she had been

pronounced out of danger, he supplied her with the most beautiful flowers that were to be procured in the neighbourhood, each day imperceptibly prolonging his visit, and becoming more intimate. Their aunt they never saw at all; she had requested him to explain at some length her fear of fever and unconquerable dread of infection in general; and he had been assured by Melanie, that such excuses were quite unnecessary, and that they had not expected to see her. One morning as he alighted from his horse, and extended his hand to his groom for the carefully carried bouquet, a stranger, who had entered the house at the same time, asked in a hurried manner, if he could tell him where the Countess Falkenstein resided?

“Here,” answered Colonel Glaneck, turning towards the now well-known door, which was no sooner opened than, with a smile of welcome, he was admitted, his inquiries circumstantially answered, and then unceremoniously allowed to pass on. When Justine turned to the person who had entered with him, she looked intently at a face so strongly resembling a miniature which Cyrilla had shown her, that she scarcely required to hear the name of Zorndorff. She had heard of Cyrilla’s engagement to him; was ignorant of the purport of his last letter, for Cyrilla could not, and Fernanda would not, speak of it; and she had therefore been in daily expectation of his arrival from the time that he had ceased to write, and now told him so with all the freedom of an old and valued servant, to whom time had given a right to consider herself a member of the family of which she had so long formed a part concomitant. Feeling no desire to explain, Zorndorff would probably have entered the adjoining room, had he not for so many reasons disliked the idea of meeting Melanie before witnesses; he therefore sat down, and requesting Justine to relate to him every thing that had occurred since Cyrilla’s return home, listened with an interest of that absorbing description that unconsciously induces the relator to be diffuse, and prevented him from obtaining half the information he desired before Colonel Glaneck again appeared, and, passing through the ante-room, disturbed with a few casual words and a half suppressed smile the incongruous *tête-à-tête*.

Without waiting to be announced, Zorndorff entered the drawing-room, and found himself in the presence of Melanie.

A stifled exclamation of surprise was followed by an assumption of such frigid dignity that he stopped for a moment irresolute, looked round the room as if to assure himself that they were alone, and then advancing quickly towards her, said, "Do not refuse me your assistance in this most critical moment of my life, Melanie—I have erred, but my punishment is already greater than even you can imagine!"

"Why are you here?" she asked almost sternly.

"They told me Cyrilla was . . . dying."

"Who spoke to you of her?"

"The Lindesmars."

"If," said Melanie, "if they had said she wished to die, they would have been nearer the truth; but all immediate danger is over now, and we have hopes of her recovery."

"I know it . . . can I see her?"

"You! Impossible—the slightest agitation might cause a relapse."

"Then my only hope is now, as ever, in your mediation."

"Mediation! oh never expect it again; you have used it to bring disgrace and sorrow on us both."

Zorndorff threw himself into a chair, and leaning his arm on the nearest table let his head sink on it, while she continued: "Had you been satisfied with a simple engagement, my unhappy sister might have considered her case a common one, and the grief and bitter mortification to which you would have subjected her might in time have been forgiven, if not forgotten. Young as she is . . . the clouded morning of her life might gradually have been changed into a cheerful noon by her union with . . ."

"Rupert?—he being the sun destined to dispel the clouds"—cried Zorndorff, looking up fiercely.—"Listen to me, Melanie; it was the fear or rather the certainty of having him for a rival that drove me to extremities—my peace of mind—my jealous love required . . . the security I have obtained! Love such as mine . . ."

"Love!" cried Melanie, interrupting him angrily, "and

do you call such selfishness love?—Well may Cyrilla say that mutual personal admiration was all that ever existed between you.”

Zorndorff started up.—“Do you mean me to understand that she has ceased to care for me?” he asked with suppressed vehemence.

“Your letter was the immediate cause of her mother’s death . . .” began Melanie.

“It would not have been had you arrived as I supposed you would a day earlier—not even on such an occasion could you lay aside your dilatory habits! It is inexcusable!”

“True!” said Melanie, who felt all the justness of the remark, “too true!—Throughout this unfortunate affair, I have erred unceasingly; yet, Heaven knows, I meant well, and thought, in promoting your wishes, I was securing for Cyrilla a happiness denied to myself. I hoped—but let us now, instead of reproaching each other, endeavour to repair the grievous injury we have done her.”

“In what way?” asked Zorndorff hastily.

“By procuring a divorce.”

“From Margaret?”

“No, from Cyrilla.”

“Never!”

“She can demand it—insist on it.”

“She can—but will she obtain it?”

“I am totally ignorant of all such matters—” began Melanie.

“Fortunately I am not,” said Zorndorff, quietly; “I know perfectly well what I have done.”

“But,” she rejoined, with evident irritation, “but it is not necessary to study law to know that a man may not have two wives! Cyrilla has a right to sue for a divorce.”

“Most undoubtedly. It is true, the necessary legal proceedings and investigations will not be particularly agreeable to her . . . but she will have the satisfaction of branding me with infamy, and depriving me of my liberty for some of the best years of my life.”

“How so?” cried Melanie, alarmed.

“The penalty of bigamy is imprisonment in a . . . house of correction.”

“Good heavens, we never thought of that . . . how could you venture to run such a risk?”

“I was worried—tortured into it . . . perhaps, also, I hoped that Cyrilla would be . . . merciful . . . but at all events,” added Zorndorff, with provoking calmness, “she would find it difficult without my assistance to prove her marriage, and that is the first step necessary for her to take. You forget that the important papers are all in my possession.”

“O, how implicitly we trusted you!” exclaimed Melanie, bitterly.

“You need not regret it; they shall be placed at her disposition whenever she chooses to ask me for them; but the application must be personal.”

“My poor Cyrilla, what trials are before you!” cried Melanie, vainly endeavouring to repress her tears, “and for me too; for now, indeed, I see that there is no alternative, and I must apply to Wilhelm for advice.”

“Apply to my uncle! Beware of that, if you do not for yourself desire the next thing to a divorce. Your confession that you have been accessory to a marriage which, if known, must now bring disgrace on us all—will destroy the remains of your domestic peace, and make a separation from him inevitable.”

“And this I must hear from you; and said so calmly . . . so coldly!”

“It is your own fault, Melanie; why do you so ungenerously threaten, instead of, as I expected, making common cause with me? I know that my fate is in your hands; but I know also that yours is so entangled in it, that if I may not hope, I shall at least have little to fear from you.”

Melanie was so evidently intimidated, that he added, almost authoritatively: “Your influence with Cyrilla is unbounded; endeavour to appease her just resentment; induce her to preserve our secret for a year or two, and all will end well; and, without any painful explanations or scandalous investigations, we can spend the rest of our lives together, surrounded by all the comforts and luxuries which none but fools pretend to despise.”

“But . . . but this Margaret” said Melanie, hesitating.

“In a few months her miserable existence will probably terminate—unhealthy from her birth, and the last three years more belonging to another world than this, there is not the slightest chance of her recovery.”

“This may be true,” said Melanie; “but the idea of waiting for, and rejoicing in, the death of any human being, is so repugnant to all one’s better feelings, that”

“That you would rather not have it placed as fact before you in common words,” said Zorndorff, scoffingly.

Roused to anger, Melanie stood up, and though her voice faltered, her brows contracted over her dark eyes, as she answered: “Your words shall be repeated to Cyrilla as soon as she is well enough to bear them; but I can no longer conceal from you that you have forfeited her esteem, and with it her affection. Whether or not the millions which you will inherit from this other unfortunate woman will enable you to regain her heart, I leave you to judge; you know best if it be purchasable.”

“Stay,” cried Zorndorff, as she was about to leave him; “stay, and recall those words I cannot believe them; if there be truth in woman, Cyrilla loves me!”

“She did.”

“She does and women can forgive so much!”

“Some, but not all,” said Melanie, endeavouring to speak calmly. “The Adlerkrons are proud, and a greater insult, a more unpardonable wrong, has seldom been offered to any woman.”

“But time time will enable me to repair it I knew that when I yielded to temptation I mean to say the commands of my father, and a no matter what procure me time, dear Melanie, and my future life shall be a series of amends for this one great offence. Should Cyrilla, however, be inexorable, as you seem to think,” he added, moodily, “you may tell her that she has no opposition to fear from me. I shall have but one subject of regret that the walls of a prison will *so long* separate her from her convict husband!”

“Edouard, Edouard, this is too dreadful; how can you speak so?”

“It does not sound well, I confess, and the affair will be talked of as a proof of the depravity of the upper classes. There is but one way of making Cyrilla free, and perhaps I ought to tell it to you an expedient in every way befitting our rank, and which might be managed without the unpleasant facts ever becoming public.”

“Oh name it, name it, Edouard; why did you not speak of it sooner?”

“You have only to consult Rupert, and your difficulties are at an end.”

“What can he do?”

“Persuade a friend to load one of those pistols that Cyrilla used to admire so much at Freilands; an ounce of lead from so unerring a hand would relieve you both from all further embarrassments.”

“Edouard, if you had ever in the least cared for me, or even believed in my regard for you, you could not torture me in this manner. Go and if it be any consolation to you, believe that you have made two others in this world as wretched as you deserve to be yourself. Go, and never speak to me again.”

“Not so, Melanie; not so, my dearest aunt,” cried Zorndorff, beseechingly. “We have been, and must continue, allies. The satisfactory termination of this unhappy affair is now nearly of as much consequence to you as to me. As I said before, my uncle would never pardon the part you have acted in it, so there is nothing left for you but to overcome your repugnance, and listen to reason.”

Melanie sat down again, and listened with averted head, while he continued: “My engagement to Cyrilla, had we entered into one, would have lasted two or three years at least. Now, the Sommerfeld’s physician told me that Margaret could not possibly live longer than that time, though both she and her father were fully convinced that I could effect her restoration to health, as I possessed the power of putting her, in a few minutes, into a state of mesmeric sleep-waking.”

"A somnambulist!" cried Melanie, turning towards him with a look of astonishment.

"A nervous, capricious woman," said Zorndorff, "who can think and talk of nothing but her sensations and her sufferings."

"I dare say she does suffer," said Melanie, compassionately; "almost all somnambulists do, more or less . . . but, oh Edouard, they sometimes live long, very long . . . the somnambulist of Prevorst, you know . . ."

"I know . . . I know," he cried, impatiently; "but Margaret's case is quite different, though she imagines there is great similarity. I endeavour to submit with patience to all the fancies of a person on whom death has already laid his hand; but I have declined the office of mesmerizer, and have resigned her to the care of a young man in Exfort, who has written a book on Magnetic Phenomena, though I do not think he knows much about the matter. However, he talks to her of neurology and neurotics, listens attentively to her dreams, allows her to prescribe for herself, and so amuses her, and partially emancipates me. There is also a homœopath at Exfort."

"But surely she does not try two modes of treatment at the same time?"

"I believe she would try twenty if she could: she has no other thought, no other occupation, than the recovery of her health."

"I am surprised she did not wish to remain in Berlin in order to have better advice."

"She may have wished it; but, as I have not the least idea of giving up my profession, *my* return to Exfort was inevitable."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Melanie, "as it will compel me to give up my plan of taking Cyrilla back with me."

"Why so? I shall carefully avoid embarrassing her, and we are not likely to meet often."

"Poor thing!" said Melanie, in a low voice, "she will feel her mother's loss and your cruel desertion doubly if obliged to remain here with her cold-hearted, miserly, selfish aunt!"

“Then why not persuade her to return to Exfort? I will promise never to enter your house—never to speak to her.”

“But what chance would there be of her regaining her health and peace of mind under such circumstances?” said Melanie sorrowfully. “Living at Exfort, and associating with the same people, how could you avoid meeting—how avoid speaking without giving subject to unpleasant remarks? and then what danger for Cyrilla, who naturally still thinks she has a better right to your affection than your acknowledged wife!”

“I thought you said that I had forfeited her regard,” said Zorndorff, vainly endeavouring to suppress a smile of exultation.

“She has said so—repeatedly—but can one believe her?”

“I can *not*,” answered Zorndorff; “and it was this certainty which gave me courage to accept the gifts that fortune seemed so determined to force on me with Margaret Sommerfeld,—gifts which will yet be shared with Cyrilla. . . . Dearest Melanie, endeavour to make her view our marriage in the light of a solemn engagement; induce her to forgive this one most criminal dereliction on my part, and all will end well for her, for you, and for me.”

“I am afraid that it is the only course left for us,” said Melanie, with a deep sigh. “Cyrilla must be a victim to my fears and your avarice, and I must try to make her resigned to her fate.”

Zorndorff felt that this was all he could demand or expect, and slowly and reluctantly took leave. “I wish you would write to me,” he said earnestly. “You can easily imagine what a relief to my mind a few lines from you would be, after you have spoken to Cyrilla. Just now I am supposed to be in Silesia, inspecting some property; but in less than a week I shall return to Exfort, so you may direct there.” At the door he stopped, looked round, and said: “Cyrilla’s recovery will be slow in this gloomy abode. Stay with her, Melanie, as long as you

can, and speak of me incessantly until you have obtained my pardon."

Long and deeply Melanie pondered over all she had heard, slowly and carefully she communicated it to her sister. Cyrilla listened with a patient resignation, partly caused by the remaining weakness of illness, still more by the great change which her feelings had undergone. She comprehended perfectly Melanie's fears of her husband's anger, and shared them; she perceived that in destroying her sister's domestic peace she was not likely to promote her own; and, although all Zorndorff's calculating selfishness had become evident to her, she shuddered equally at the idea of his being condemned to a disgraceful punishment, and at the misery which the acknowledgment of her rights would bring on a woman who had been still more basely deceived by him. As she lay for hours too weak to move or speak, all these circumstances were justly weighed and considered; and when Melanie, with agitated eloquence, dwelt on the annoyances to which the legal formalities necessary to procure a divorce would subject her, Cyrilla ceased to hesitate, and promised patience and . . . silence. She stopped her sister's thanks by observing that, though her affliction was great, she had deserved it, for having joined in a system of duplicity towards the President, consented to a marriage which she knew would be displeasing to Zorndorff's family, and being, though through the medium of another, the immediate cause of her mother's death. There was but one condition on which she insisted, and that was a written promise from Zorndorff that he would not only, as he had said to Melanie, view their marriage henceforward in the light of an engagement, but as one that had been broken off by him, and consequently, even if eventually at liberty, he would consider that he had forfeited all right to claim her as his wife, or even in any way to dictate to her or control her actions.

Melanie wrote, and the returning post brought the desired promise, without a word more or less than was necessary, and Cyrilla wept over it for hours as if her

heart were breaking. This apparent inconsistency surprised Melanie, and she injudiciously confided her observations on the subject to Zorndorff, intending by that means to make him more sensible of the atrocity of his conduct, but unconsciously encouraging him in all his hopes and plans for the future.

At length Cyrilla was pronounced convalescent, and arrangements for her and her sister's removal to their aunt's commenced. Greatly they wished to remain where they were with Justine, but even Melanie seemed to think them too young for so independent a life. She stipulated, however, before she returned to Exfort, that Justine was to be left in quiet possession of the apartments, and that they were to be at liberty to spend as much time in them every day as they pleased.





CHAPTER XXIII.



THE Baroness Adlerkron laid aside her mourning at the end of a few weeks, observing in a playful manner to Colonel Glaneck, "That it was unpardonable people dying at a time of year when their relations wished to enjoy a little gaiety; that for her part she despised all outward form of woe, and so particularly disliked black, which she knew was unbecoming to her, that she never wore it a day longer than was absolutely necessary." These words served as an excuse for a continuation of the insipid round of dissipation that she denominated pleasure, and for leaving her nieces to pass their time in that quiet monotony which allows grief to exhaust itself. Fernanda regained by degrees her habitual cheerfulness, and attempted a renewal of her former occupations, but she soon discovered that her time was no longer at her own disposal. If she wished to read, her aunt required her to try duets on the pianoforte; if she drew, her neatly-finished drawing was instantly taken possession of for an album which Colonel Glaneck had given the Baroness as a specimen of Vienna workmanship; and no sooner did it become evident that she was a tolerably expert tapestry-worker, than she was condemned to stitch all the garlands and bouquets necessary to furnish a whole room! Women who have many female friends can sometimes manage to cover their chairs and sofas in a surprisingly short time by contribution; and the Baroness, all unconscious of her friendless position, made various efforts to procure assistance for her niece,

but in vain. Colonel Bockenheim's daughter alone, after having received a few hints, and some nods and expressive looks from him, undertook a sofa cushion, on which there was to be a shepherdess, apparently rather marked with the small-pox, surrounded by lambs with high noses and square eyes, the Baroness herself having declared her intention of working the shepherd, with pink shorts, flageolet, and dog, to match.

Whatever natural impatience Fernanda may have felt at the succession of petty trials of temper to which she was subjected, or at the tiresome task imposed on her skilful fingers, was increased by Justine, whose indignation knew no bounds at seeing her young lady turned, as she expressed it, into a common workwoman: she had even the courage to remonstrate with the Baroness, and also to suggest that the extreme coldness of her rooms might disagree with Cyrilla, who had been accustomed to a warmer climate for so many years; but for this injudicious interference, her future visits were declined in a manner not particularly flattering; and Cyrilla, deprived of the care to which she had been accustomed from infancy at a time when she most required it, depressed by the frigid formality of her aunt's house and habits, and shocked by her sister's silent unceasing diligence, began to pine away, and grew so thin and pale, that at length change of air and scene was peremptorily ordered by Dr. Paur.

It was too early in the season for the Baroness to be expected to go to the country, but she allowed Cyrilla to remove with Justine to her villa near Hellbrunn, and there, cheered by the beauty of the scenery, and relieved from all restraint, she gradually began to regain health and strength, though still greatly depressed in spirits; but while she clung to Justine, and seemed more conscious of and grateful for her kind attention than she had ever been before, her humble friend would much rather have seen a return of her childish petulance and most charming disobedience—she longed to hear again her merry laugh, and the joyous snatches of patois Italian songs, that had enlivened even the dull ground-floor of the ancient house in

Salzburg. But Cyrilla neither laughed nor sang: she would sit for hours silently gazing at the clouds passing over the mountains, or languidly watching the increase of vegetation that made the winter green of the pine and fir trees look dim and dark, as the surrounding chestnuts burst forth in succulent masses, or the light maple and graceful beech waved their delicate foliage in their vicinity.

Justine was a shrewd, sensible woman, fond to excess of power, and whose love of governing had for the last twenty years been exercised in the minutiae of every-day life in the Adlerkron family. Something very nearly resembling friendship had latterly subsisted between her and the Baroness Carl, and her affection for Cyrilla and Fernanda was little inferior to that of a mother. She submitted patiently as a parent would have done, to seeing her little gifts of fruit, flowers, bon bons, and birds, treated with neglect, but Cyrilla's silence about Zorndorff mortified her beyond measure. She knew that he had ceased to write, that his name, or any reference to him, caused annoyance, if not actual pain; and at length one day, when Cyrilla had wept until she had given herself a headache, and worried herself into a fit of unusual depression, Justine took advantage of the open writing-desk and well-known packet of letters, to demand the explanation she had vainly hoped would have been offered her. It was given in very few words, and caused boundless consternation and anger, although allowed to suppose that a broken engagement was the "head and front" of Zorndorff's "offending." The idea of Cyrilla's having been deserted in such a manner appeared to Justine so monstrous, that she could think and talk of nothing else for several days; and as no feeling of personal regard hampered her judgment, it was of implacable severity.

The unreserved animadversions, which Cyrilla knew were but too well merited, produced a return of the abhorrence that she had at first experienced, and, while under its influence, she sent Zorndorff's picture and letters to Melanie, begged her sister to obtain hers in return, and

then never to name him to her again, as she neither wished to be reminded of the cruel bondage to which circumstances compelled her to submit, nor of the author of it. Justine, observing the irritation produced by her frequent discussions of the disagreeable topic, ceased all reference to it, and Cyrilla slowly regained her equanimity; time and her constitutional buoyancy of temperament at length prevailed, and resignation took the form of a quiet indifference of manner that never even verged towards the light-hearted gaiety for which she had formerly been so remarkable.

Her aunt and sister joined her, and the usual summer amusements began; that is, every fine day was devoted to excursions in the neighbourhood, and spent altogether in the open air. This mode of life so peculiar to southern climates, this reading, talking, eating, and drinking in public, so repugnant to English habits, was formerly more universal than now, and was common to the highest as well as the lowest classes. A cloudless sky seldom, a cloudless Sunday sky never, failed to fill all the beautifully situated gardens in the neighbourhood of Salzburg. While the unsociable inhabitants of Britain seek the most secluded spots for their pic-nics, or, preceded by their servants, occupy the half-aired dining-room of some uninhabited castle, house, or cottage, as the case may be, the Germans, more gregarious, assemble round tables in the gardens of the never-failing inns, move about from one friendly group to the other, renew or increase their acquaintances, and have all the pleasure of society on the easiest terms imaginable. It is much to be regretted that the upper classes are beginning to disdain these simple enjoyments, the more so as their example may influence those who are not likely to find anything to replace them. The gnawing sickly kind of ambition that causes an insatiable desire to associate with and imitate those placed by birth and fortune in a higher sphere, has long been felt by the class termed bureaucratists, and has in no way tended to increase their happiness; but the love of pleasure still most frequently preponderates, and, half ashamed of their cou-

descension, half disposed to be happy, they may still be seen occupying tables and benches somewhat apart from the joyous, noisy, and ever hungry citizens.

With the exception of a few families who now-a-days merely walk through the gardens, casting supercilious glances around them, the bureaucratists and burghers seem to be much the same as they were years ago. The rising generation are perhaps rather more open in the expression of annoyance at the voluminous white cravat and brown coat of grandpapa, or the old-fashioned bonnet and monstrous reticule of grandmamma, while even papa's own wig, and mamma's portly dimensions, form not unfrequently a subject of open ridicule. But though the sons, when arrived at the age of cigars, emancipate themselves, and wander about bestowing casual bows and words on their acquaintances, the daughters still follow their mothers, or, sitting demurely beside them, with an affectation of industry more amusing than offensive, produce pieces of portable crochet work, exciting astonishment, and greatly promoting conversation, by showing the marvellous variety of things which they contrive to make in this manner—as, for instance, various imitations of lace, then cuffs, collars, and children's caps, formless jackets, and square or octagonal morsels of a coarser pattern, that, when sewn together, produce a quilt of a heavy clinging description, which nothing would tempt any one to endure, but the conviction that a host of kind intentions had propelled the dear hands that worked it for them. At all events, this crochet work is infinitely preferable to its predecessor, the long stocking; this most necessary article of clothing now seldom makes its appearance as ornamental work, excepting in the most diminutive forms, and generally for infant-school Christmas presents.

The gay groups of people who every Sunday and holiday passed the Baroness's villa on their way to Hellbrunn presented a picture of life in its gayest aspect: fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters, all in their best attire; neighbours' families, united for the afternoon, walking in an ever-changing procession; carriages of all descriptions,

from the large family barouche stuffed with children, to the Styrian *wügerl*, with its handsome saucy peasant proprietor, who has a word and a wink for each passer by; light fantastic vehicles of every kind filled with lolling smoking officers; equestrians on horses becoming interestingly restive at the sight of a flowing robe of white or blue, and performing the most perfect caprioles when within a few yards of any or every bonnet with pendent plumes.

One fine fête day towards the middle of summer, just as the Adlerkrons were about to join this motley crowd, a travelling carriage, which, in spite of the incessant cracking of the postillion's whips, had latterly made its way but slowly, turned suddenly into the short approach leading to their house.

"Who can this be?" cried the Baroness, in no pleased tone of voice; "post horses and postillions in blue and white! I hate the sight of the Bavarian liveries, as they always bring me visitors for the whole day. This is of course some one who will stay to dinner, and . . ."

"It is Rupert!" cried Cyrilla, almost joyously, as she endeavoured to pass her aunt.

"Stop," said the Baroness, "something very important must have occurred, or he would not have come in this unexpected manner. Let me speak to him—alone." She walked hastily into the adjoining room, and met her nephew at the glass door.

"How d' you do? Where are my cousins? Where is Cyrilla?" asked Rupert, quickly.

"I thought, perhaps, you would wish to speak to me before you saw them. I am prepared for your intelligence—tell me the name at once. I know nothing else would have induced you to come here."

"Name! what name?" asked Rupert.

"The name of your intended wife."

"Pshaw!" cried Rupert, with a gesture of impatience.

"Let me see my cousins, and don't name the word *wife*, if you do not wish me to order fresh horses and see me go off to spend my leave of absence elsewhere."

"And are you really come of your own accord to stay with me?"

“Yes; and to quarrel with you if necessary. How is Cyrilla? is she quite strong again?”

“Why, yes—but she has grown too quiet, in fact rather dull of late—she seems to suffer so much from her hopeless attachment that . . .”

“Ha—indeed”—said Rupert, with an expression of anxiety that induced his aunt to continue in the same strain.

“I never saw any one so changed in so short a time. She has grown indifferent to everybody and everything in the world, and says if there were Protestant nunneries she would, without hesitation, enter one, take the veil, and devote herself to religious duties for the rest of her life.”

“Poor dear,” said Rupert, compassionately.

“I am glad to perceive you are not so insensible as I expected,” said his aunt, with evident satisfaction. “Perhaps, after all, you may relent—and marry her.”

“Who? I? You seem to be labouring under some strange mistake,” began Rupert; then he paused, thought for a moment, and added: “It appears to me that the loss of her mother and a long and dangerous illness account very naturally for the change you describe.”

“For *a* change, but not such a change,” rejoined his aunt.

Rupert began to pluck the flowers in his vicinity with a diligence that greatly displeased her.

“Instead of tearing my flowers to pieces, Rupert, you had better go to your consins; they are in the next room, and,” she added, opening the door, “I can answer for Cyrilla’s being glad to see you!”

“O, *so* glad,” cried Cyrilla, advancing eagerly.

His aunt could detect no difference in his manner of meeting his consins; it was so cordial, so affectionate to both, as Fernanda thanked him warmly for a letter which he had written to them after their mother’s death. The Baroness interposed.

“What letter? I never heard of any letter.”

“We were not with you when it reached us,” said Fernanda, quietly.

“Rather a fortunate circumstance,” cried Rupert, “that is, if you must show my aunt all your letters.”

“You could scarcely object to her showing me yours?” said the Baroness.

“Not I!” replied Rupert, laughing; “it would only add another to our subjects of dispute. I consider that my cousins now belong as much to me as to you; so I told them when they got tired of living with you they might come to me—that’s all!”

“You did! did you?” she exclaimed, with an appearance of anger that surprised her nieces considerably, as she had already not unfrequently given them to understand that having them to reside with her was a duty imposed on her by their near relationship, and the necessity of keeping up appearances. “I suppose, then,” she added with a slight sneer, “I suppose you intend them to follow you about to your different garrisons? What an acquisition to the regiment, especially when in country quarters!”

“Too much honour for me—or my regiment,” answered Rupert, amused at her irritation; “fortunately, however, I can give them the choice of several residences, and as I have just acquired a house in Berlin, perhaps they may prefer it to any other.”

“Rupert—I—I take it for granted—I am sure you are not aware that you are acting in direct opposition to your uncle’s will.”

“How so?”

“He recommended your cousins to—to *my* protection,” replied the Baroness, turning to a servant who just then entered the room.

“Your protection! and nothing else?”

She did not hear him, and added testily a moment afterwards: “Why, Rupert, they tell me you want stabling for eight horses! Do you think that this house is a Windhorst or Freilands? Did you forget that I had horses here too?”

“Tell them to find out some place for mine in the neighbourhood,” said Rupert, carelessly.

“And four grooms,” continued his aunt, “and a britchzka

and phaeton—what can we do with all these in a small place of this kind?”

“I’m sure I don’t know—but we had better leave all that to Ehrhardt,” said Rupert, turning again to Cyrilla, who could not help smiling at her aunt’s dismay; while Fernanda, half alarmed, stood forward and seemed disposed to undertake the part of mediatrix.

During the discussion which ensued, the author of the commotion leaned quietly against the side of an open window, and in a low voice addressed his cousin: “At Freilands, Cyrilla, I said that we should not meet again for years unless something quite unforeseen should occur, but this having been the case I . . .”

“O, Rupert,” she cried, interrupting him hastily; “do not speak of anything that occurred at Freilands.”

“I have no intention—I referred to your mother’s death, and your, I fear, uncomfortable position here, and have come expressly to consult you and Fernanda about your plans for the future.”

“Thank you, Rupert,” said Cyrilla, hurriedly; “you are very kind. Our prospects are not brilliant, it is true, nor are we as—happy as we used to be; but, after all, we have no right to complain; and, to be candid with you, both Fernanda and I agree in thinking that we cannot, under any circumstances, go to you until—until—you are married.”

Rupert turned to his aunt, and begged her to give herself no further trouble; it was very probable he would remain but a few days with her.

“But everything is arranged, Rupert. I was only just at first a little puzzled about so many horses; and you know there is nothing I dislike so much as having other people’s servants in my house, especially yours, who are so spoiled and pampered: however, there is no use in talking to you about that, so if you have no objections we can now all go to Hellbrunn together.”

Their entrance into the garden at Hellbrunn caused a degree of commotion which was particularly gratifying to the Baroness. The tables were all occupied, but one was

immediately procured from the house, and in a few minutes she and her nieces were the "observed of all observers," and surrounded by officers of every rank and age.

Rupert became acquainted with them all in an astonishingly short time; and then, looking round and perceiving his friends of the year before, he went to them, and not only appeared but was glad to see them, from Colonel Bockenheim and his daughter, to the Bornstedts who lodged on the second floor of his aunt's house. After having obtained a few words and a great many blushes from the youthful daughter of the latter, he proposed accompanying them to see the water-works, on condition that Mademoiselle Josephine would promise to walk beside him, and tell him how to avoid the usual shower-baths bestowed on strangers for the amusement of the public. Willingly she promised, and it would be hard to say whether the Bornstedts' exultation or his aunt's annoyance was the greater as he walked off with them.

"Was there ever any one so tiresome as Rupert?" cried the Baroness, looking after him; "he always chooses to bestow his attentions on the very people I wish him to avoid!"

"He is bestowing them on one of the prettiest girls in Salzburg," answered an officer, laughing. "It is a great pity we are to lose her so soon . . . You have of course heard of the silent wooing and sudden betrothal?"

No; they knew nothing about the matter.

"In fact," said the officer, "it is our newest news; for it was only last Sunday, in this very garden, that the Bornstedt family assembled round one of those tables to eat cakes and drink coffee in the usual quantities, and at a neighbouring table a solitary stranger sat, and ate and drank also; but while doing so, he amused himself watching the Bornstedts, and taking a very serious kind of fancy to the charming little person of the fair Josephine. When they rose to return home, he rose too, followed them, and as they were about to enter their house, he suddenly addressed the young lady's father, and, having taken him aside, told him who and what he was, and . . . demanded

his daughter's hand in marriage! Herr Bornstedt stared a little, bowed very politely, requested he would have the kindness to call for an answer in a couple of days, and then, walking up stairs, informed his family without circumlocution of all that had been said."

"And . . . and," said Fernanda, "what was her answer?"—"Her answer was an unanswerable query, consisting of but two words," replied the officer, laughing. "She merely said, 'Why not?' and as no one could say why not, she is to be married some time next month."*

An exceedingly moderate degree of surprise was manifested, a few questions followed, a jest or two about the unusually handsome face and figure of the silent adorer not having been unobserved by the young lady even in the garden, some remarks, not worth recording, of love at first sight; and then Cyrilla leaned back in her chair, heedless of all the attentions lavished on her, or receiving them with a listlessness which many supposed affectation, while Fernanda poured out the coffee, discussed its merits in a very satisfactory manner, explained the way in which the Hellbrunn *krapfen* (cakes) were made, and how they should be torn asunder instead of being cut, and received the laughing congratulations of Colonel Bockenheim and his daughter on her progress in German cookery with a very good grace.

Rupert was long absent; and as he at last sauntered towards his aunt's table, she turned round, and said ironically, "I hope you have been as surprised and delighted with the water-works as you expected?"

"If I were not, some Tyrolese peasants were," he answered, laughing. "Not all Mademoiselle Josephine's warnings could keep me out of the perfidious grotto, so irresistible were the wondering upturned faces and open mouths just when the secret spring was touched and the water gushed from hundreds of concealed apertures upon them."

"I think the whole concern tiresome and childish," said

* Fact.

the Baroness; "it does not in the least amuse me seeing half-a-dozen peasants pursued by water-spouts!"

"Yet it amused me to see their efforts to escape from them," said Rupert. "I wish they would engage me as showman for a week or two."

"What a droll idea!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Bockenheim, who was standing behind Fernanda's chair, endeavouring to appear very intimate with her.

"I think the falls of water over the bouquets of fresh flowers very pretty," said Cyrilla; "they look like glass that had become alive."

"If you had ever seen any really handsome fountains," said her aunt, "or water-works on a grand scale, you would not think anything here worth looking at."

"Excuse me," said Rupert, "but I must say that would altogether depend upon the constitution of her mind. I have seen fountains and water-works enough, you will allow; but, being blest with what Melanie calls an elastic imagination, that contracts or extends itself according to circumstances, I confess, without hesitation, that all I have just seen has both pleased and amused me, even to the two little tortoises that keep perpetually spitting at each other!"

"Rupert!"

"I am quite serious, I assure you. Pleasure is in ourselves, and not in the things around us. When one is disposed to mirth, the most trifling object affords amusement; when in a happy temper, there are few things that fail to give pleasure. I avoid all mental comparisons that interfere with present gratification, whether they concern beauties of nature or art. When at Versailles, I did not think of the scenery and mountains here; nor, when here, will I think of the water-works and fountains of Versailles."

"In short," said Count Glaneck, "you are determined to enjoy everything without alloy."

"Precisely; and those who do otherwise lose much pleasure, I suspect. I pity people who turn away from a really well composed, well painted modern picture, because

it is not equal to some Correggio or Rembrandt they had seen somewhere else. Now, a picture must be very indifferent indeed not to afford me some sort of gratification; and as to music, though perhaps I can appreciate it better than anything else, a hurdy-gurdy, provided it be in order and played by a picturesque-looking Savoyard boy, can give me very sincere satisfaction."

"I like this idea," said Fernanda, "and shall endeavour to act on it in future; but how few people have these enviably elastic minds!"

"More than choose to acknowledge it," answered Rupert. "People will not avow their gratification at mediocrity, because they feel it might be supposed they were ignorant that something better was attainable."

"An absurd weakness," said Fernanda.

"Rather say vanity," rejoined Rupert; "and, after all, one of the most harmless of vanities. The worst kind is perhaps that which produces a craving for things beyond our reach—a discontent that lessens or altogether spoils the enjoyments of life . . . but from a portion of this vanity not one in a thousand is ever wholly emancipated."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed the Baroness; as if vanity had anything to do with admiring or not admiring insignificant water-works!"

"I don't think you quite understand Rupert . . ." began Fernanda.

"I don't want to understand him. I hate moralizing in a place of this kind."

"And yet," said Rupert, assuming an air of mock gravity as he looked round him, "and yet, just in such places, in summer assemblies of this kind, the temptation to do so is great; especially on vanity, which presents itself here in so many different forms."

"Perhaps so; but you might just as well talk in this way in a ball-room as here."

"I have not time at a ball," said Rupert. "Either I am too busy dancing, or too much occupied with my own vanities to observe others."

"Is it possible," cried Mademoiselle de Bockenheim,

with a silly simper, "is it possible that *men* are vain in ball-rooms? I thought it was only women who were young or handsome who had a right to be vain!"

"I am inclined to dispute the right of either man or woman," answered Rupert; "but I believe the quality itself is very equally divided between them."

"And do you mean to say that you care about—about people admiring—or—or liking you—and wishing to dance with you, and all that!"

"Most certainly—and you cannot be more flattered at receiving our attentions, than we are in perceiving their effects, of which we can judge with surprising nicety."

"I think, Adlerkron, you are making very unnecessary confessions," observed Count Glaneck, smiling.

"Mademoiselle de Bockenheim has taken advantage of my simplicity," said Rupert, "but the rest shall be made to my cousins, who, I rather expect, will accompany me to the Monat-schloss (Month Castle), which they tell me is so called from having been built by an eccentric Englishman in exactly thirty days."

He looked at Cyrilla, but she did not move until desired to do so by the Baroness. Notwithstanding his explanation, she had discovered the lurking hope that had induced him voluntarily to become an inmate of his aunt's house; knew there was but one line of conduct henceforth for her, and resolved to pursue it steadily. She accompanied her cousin, but so conscientiously avoided any renewal of their former unreserved intercourse, that Rupert, piqued and irritated, turned completely to Fernanda, not only for the remainder of that day, but also the succeeding ones; and Cyrilla soon found herself in the isolated position that she had endeavoured to obtain, but which, to an affectionate disposition such as hers, was infinitely painful.


All Fernanda's spare time was thenceforward devoted to Rupert: she sang with him, talked to him, and walked with him more than Cyrilla herself had done at Freilands. She seemed to delight in his gaiety, entered into all his plans of amusement, and received gratefully, and without

hesitation, not only all the attentions and presents he was disposed to bestow on her, but also those which Cyrilla thought it her duty to decline; and at length the latter, with a mixture of feelings which she found it impossible to understand, began to contemplate Rupert as the future husband of her sister. All the advantages of so desirable a connexion rose distinctly before her; all his estimable qualities became evident; all she had ever heard in his praise recurred to her memory. Of her sister's happiness she felt perfectly assured, and yet—her satisfaction was not as unalloyed as she thought it ought to be. She endeavoured quietly, and as she supposed imperceptibly, to absent herself from the drawing-room; but though she merely took her work, book, or drawing materials into the adjoining apartment, in which her aunt and Count Glaneck were sitting, and that the doors of communication still continued open, the change was disagreeable to Rupert, and he soon began to ride over into Salzburg and make engagements there, not unfrequently dining with the officers, or joining them in hunting excursions, which prolonged his absence to several days. His aunt was first surprised, then offended; said that he made a hotel of her house, leaving her his grooms and horses; going off and coming back just as suited his convenience—all very well if . . . but she would have an explanation with him the very next time they met.





CHAPTER XXIV.

HE projected explanation did not take place, although the day on which Rupert returned, after a long absence in the Tyrol, was of that description generally chosen by the Baroness for "explanations," especially with her nieces, lawyer, steward, or housekeeper. It was one of those days on which the barometer falls suddenly to wind and rain, and no tapping of impatient fingers will raise the quicksilver even to the convex form that admits of hope. The air was perceptibly warm, the sky blue, the sun shining brightly—no one but a weather-wise inhabitant of Salzburg could have watched with an eye of suspicion the small white cloud that hung so lightly over the Bavarian mountains in the west, and which, like the first thought of evil, seemed to the careless unworthy of consideration; but while windless sunshine glowed around the villa, the atmosphere in which the cloud hovered was evidently in commotion, moving backwards and forwards, its size imperceptibly increased, and at length, like a long dark serpent, it began to wind itself round the summit of the nearest mountain, behind which, about the same time, masses of heavy threatening clouds rose, and slowly crept along the sky. Rupert, who was in an open carriage on the road beneath, with some friends, first laughed at their predictions of storm, rain, and hail; but no sooner perceived the sun covered and the gloom momentarily increasing, than he became as willing as the others to hurry forward. He drove at a furious rate into Salzburg, reached

it before the storm commenced; but such is the perverseness of human nature when in the form of young and daring men, that Rupert, delighted with the excitement, after having left his companions at the gate of the barracks, determined to go at once to his aunt's. Remonstrances were vain, he gave the rein to his half-frightened, half-irritated horses, and reached the river-side just as the thunder began to roll, and the wind swept in long gusts along the road, bending the trees and raising whirlwinds of dust. Unable to see more than a few yards before him, the heads of the leaders not unfrequently invisible, and his light carriage swinging from side to side with each motion of the bounding horses, he was more rejoiced than he would perhaps have chosen to acknowledge when he reached the turn to the Baroness's villa. Short as was the remaining way, he was completely wet through before he reached the house, and was obliged at once to take refuge in his room.

As he was leisurely completing an unusually elaborate toilet, and carefully endeavouring to erase the traces of some days' neglect from his long moustache, his aunt sent to request that he would "come to her without a moment's delay;" but, accustomed to such messages from her, he attached no sort of importance to it, and descended half an hour afterwards to the drawing-room without the slightest presentiment that the storm within doors was scarcely inferior to that without.

The Baroness was walking up and down the apartment waving her pocket-handkerchief, and speaking loudly and angrily. Cyrilla bent over some alpine flowers which were scattered on the table before her, and unconsciously played with them; while her eyes were anxiously fixed on her sister, who stood near the window apparently unmoved, her arms slightly crossed, her head erect, gazing at the falling rain as intently as if endeavouring to count the drops.

"O, Rupert," exclaimed his aunt the moment he appeared, "never did you arrive more opportunely. As the head of our family, you have a right to give an opinion

on occasions of this kind; and though Fernanda says it will be a matter of indifference to you whom she may marry . . .”

“A matter of indifference to me!” cried Rupert, turning quickly to his cousin; “nothing concerning Fernanda can ever be a matter of indifference to me: and as to whom she may marry,” he added gaily, “I think there are so very few worthy of her, that I feel tempted to refuse my consent beforehand.”

“No jesting, Rupert,” cried his aunt impatiently: “this is no jesting matter, I assure you,—even Count Glaneck, who was present when I received the letter, seemed quite shocked at the very idea of such a thing!”

“Indeed! Then he is not the man we are about to refuse?”

“Can you not be serious for five minutes, Rupert? One would really suppose you might be so at least when one of your nearest relations is about to make a most odious and unsuitable connexion.”

“Fernanda is the last person in the world likely to do anything of that kind,” said Rupert composedly. “My confidence in her is unbounded.”

“And yet she has just declared her intention of marrying Colonel Bockenheim!”

“Colonel Bockenheim!” repeated Rupert, amazed. “I—I never thought of him.”

“Nor I,” said his aunt, “nor any of us—not even Fernanda herself, most probably, until about an hour ago, when I received a letter demanding her hand, and asking what I was disposed to settle on her in the first instance! First or last, not a florin, not a kreutzer; I will not even give her the burgher-like trousseau befitting the station for which she seems to have so decided a predilection.”

“The predilection is in this case, I should suppose, for the man,” observed Rupert, gravely.

“Ah, bah! How can a girl of her age feel anything of the kind for an elderly, bald-headed, pensioned colonel of dragoons,—a widower, without title or connexion, or . . .”

“As to that,” said Rupert, “in these enlightened days prejudices respecting rank are . . .”

“Don’t talk revolutionary nonsense,” cried his aunt, interrupting him angrily; “but remember that you are the head of an ancient family, and ought to point out to Fernanda that she is about to demean herself and all of us. One would really imagine you were disposed to agree with her in thinking it quite a desirable match.”

“By no means,” cried Rupert, hastily. “I—I cannot approve—wish I mean to say—that is—in short, I think, instead of speaking scoffingly of Colonel Bockenheim, it would be better to talk reasonably to Fernanda.”

“Talk to her in any way you please,” said his aunt; “perhaps you may make more impression on her than I have done; but don’t listen to anything she may say about her dependent situation or wanting a home.”

“Excuse me,” said Rupert, “but I think if she listen to us we are bound to listen to her.”

“But it is not true. I am quite willing to let her live with me, and have told her repeatedly that I have no sort of objection to having her in my house.”

“I dare say not; but the question is, whether or not she choose to remain in it. Fernanda, will you forgive my interference—will you allow me to offer advice?”

“She must—she shall,” cried his aunt. “It is your duty to interfere on this occasion, and I insist on your doing so.”

“Dreadful responsibility,” exclaimed Rupert, half laughing as she left the room; “but we are not going to act tableaux for your amusement, I can tell you,” he added, nodding to her, and then quietly and carefully closing the doors between the rooms.

“Now, Fernanda,” he said, seating himself with mock deliberation in a large arm-chair, “you see that necessity, and my aunt’s commands, compel me to lecture you. Come here and listen to the suggestions of prudence, and the words of warning offered you by ‘the head of your family.’”

But Fernanda stood immovable, determination legible in every feature of her face.

“You look uncommonly refractory,” he continued: “will you not favour me with your confidence, and let me

know the particulars of this equally strange and sudden matrimonial project?"

"All this may be very amusing to you, Rupert," said Fernanda petulantly, as she threw herself into the nearest chair, "but, unfortunately, *I* cannot find it so."

"Nonsense! you don't mean to say that you attach any importance to what my aunt has said?"

"No, nor to what you may say either."

"Why, this is actual rebellion!" cried Rupert, rolling his chair towards hers, so as to have a full view of her face. "O, you are in earnest, real downright earnest, I perceive, and—I—must believe all that my aunt has said."

Fernanda turned her head away from him, and remained silent.

"Will you or will you not speak to me?" he asked after a pause.

"I—cannot."

"And why? Just fancy me your—your—grandfather, or something of that sort, for the next half-hour."

"My grandfather! that *would* be a stretch of the imagination."

"Brother, I should have said, perhaps, but that is too romantic for me, and rather dangerous into the bargain."

"Dangerous?"

"Yes, make-believe brothers so often turn into lovers, you know."

"Do they?" said Fernanda with ill-concealed embarrassment, as she played with a bracelet that Rupert had given her the day after his arrival.

"In novels always, at least as far as my experience goes; and novels they say are, or ought to be, pictures of life. I have often wished for sisters, that is, real sisters, and rejoiced that I had something so nearly resembling them as cousins."

"I should not have thought so," said Fernanda. "You did not show any inclination to see or know us after our return to Germany."

She was surprised at the impression these words made on him. More than a minute elapsed before he said

gravely: "My dilatoriness was severely punished; it prejudiced Cyrilla against me—and—you too seem not to have forgotten or forgiven it."

Fernanda attempted to deny this, but she stammered and became confused. He did not perceive it, and continued quietly: "O, I know you have both learned to tolerate me,—most people contrive to do that some way or other; but you know I wished for something more, and aspired to what *you* profess to feel for Colonel Bockenheim."

"Colonel Bockenheim . . ." repeated Fernanda, her colour increasing, and her embarrassment so evident, that Rupert at last became aware of it, and said:

"Excuse my having doubted the possibility of your being determined to marry him . . . I begin to fear that I may offend you, if I say that it seems odd to me your finding anything congenial . . . or attractive . . . in a man . . . so . . . so . . ."

"So very dull as Colonel Bockenheim, you would say," interrupted Fernanda. "It is true, he is not gay, or handsome, or young; but I think I shall be able to like him tolerably well before long, and . . ."

"My dear Fernanda, if you only tolerate, or hope in time to tolerate the man, I can sincerely join my aunt in endeavouring to dissuade you from a marriage so little likely to conduce to your happiness: let her write the answer to his letter that she wishes."

"If you could put yourself into my place, Rupert, for half-an-hour, you would speak differently. Remember, I am poor and plain, and most uncomfortably situated here. Cyrilla will probably return to Exfort; Melanie and the President have both urged her to do so, and then I shall be alone in this house—alone with my aunt, without any one to care for me, or any one that I can care for near me; but *you* cannot even imagine the dreariness of such an existence."

"I think I can," answered Rupert, musingly; "but, a . . . is it not possible to find some one more suited to you than this Colonel Bockenheim?"

"You mean in point of rank?"

“I mean in every way.”

“Perhaps so; but you forget that I must be chosen. Ugly women have even less chance of choice than others; and the sooner they learn to admire and love, without expecting a return, the better for them.”

“The better for us all,” said Rupert: “there are few who have not at one time or other experienced something of the kind.”

“You have not, I am sure,” said Fernanda.

“Your doubt would be very flattering if I were not aware that you knew the contrary to be the case.”

“I . . . I . . . know nothing . . . I . . .”

“Is it possible that Cyrilla did not tell *you*?”

Every trace of colour forsook Fernanda’s features, as she looked inquiringly towards the end of the room, where her sister sat. Cyrilla avoided her glance, by laying her head on the arm extended along the table before her, and as she did so her long fair ringlets mixed oddly with the wild flowers scattered upon it.

A pause ensued; Rupert broke it by saying: “There is no use in talking of that now; it was the first great disappointment of my life—the second has been the discovery, that even the friendship which I hoped would always exist between us has since been altogether withdrawn on Cyrilla’s side.”

Perhaps he expected this last assertion to be contradicted; he watched eagerly his cousin’s motionless form for a few moments, and then turned completely away from her.

“We have wandered from our subject, Fernanda; and, between my own concerns and yours, I now feel a little confused. As well as I can understand, however, it seems that the wish to leave my aunt’s protection, as she calls it, is sufficiently strong to make you willing to accept that of any other person . . . then, why not mine?”

Fernanda shook her head despondingly.

“The whole excellence of this plan never struck me until this moment,” he continued, pushing his chair still closer to hers.

"Impossible, Rupert, unless . . . you were married."

"But don't you think, just at first, an elderly relation would do as well as a wife? An aunt of my mother's might be induced to live with us . . . with you . . . on certain conditions . . ."

Fernanda hesitated; indefinite but pleasant visions of Rupert's house and Rupert's self rose before her, and for a moment her feelings overpowered her judgment. She approached her sister, and, placing her hand on her shoulder, bent down, and whispered: "What do you think, Cyrilla? Can we . . .? ought we . . .?"

"I cannot, I ought not," answered Cyrilla, looking up sorrowfully.

"Ask her if she choose to live at Freilands," said Rupert, "if I promise never to go there?"

"No," said Fernanda; "she is right—it would never answer."

"Then," said Rupert, with some impatience, "you must now point out to me in what way I can be of use to you . . ."

"You can do nothing for us," said Fernanda, regaining her usual decision of manner; "we must act for ourselves."

"And, a . . . what do you mean to do about Bockenheim?"

"My aunt may write what she pleases—that is, in civil terms."

"Oh, she will be civil enough, I have no doubt, as she most probably wishes to retain him for her winter whist-table. You will not mind meeting him, I suppose?"

"Not at all," answered Fernanda, calmly; "my aunt was quite right when she said I had never thought of him until about two hours ago."

"There is something in this business that I do not yet understand," said Rupert; "you must have had some hidden motive for pretending to wish to marry Bockenheim; that it was pretence I have no longer a doubt!"

"Not so much as you suppose," said Fernanda, a sudden flush passing across her face. "I have resolved to marry as soon as I can, in order to leave this house. Common

sense tells me that my choice will be greatly restricted; I do not particularly like, but neither do I at all dislike, Colonel Bockenheim”

“Perhaps you do particularly like some one else,” said Rupert, quickly.

“Perhaps I do.”

“Ah!” cried Rupert; “now I know where we are. All other men having become indifferent to us, or not in any way bearing a comparison with our paragon, we”

“Spare me, Rupert,” cried Fernanda, with ill-concealed emotion; “from you at least I never expected scorn or ridicule.”

“Nothing was further from my thoughts,” said Rupert, apologetically; “I assure you I have such a high opinion of your sense and judgment, that I am convinced whoever you think worth liking must be a capital fellow, and I quite long to be acquainted with him. Perhaps I know him already. Have I not seen him here? Just tell me his name, and leave me to manage the rest.”

“There is nothing to manage,” answered Fernanda, with forced composure; “he has never thought of me, and I . . . more than suspect is attached to some one else.”

“You may be mistaken,” said Rupert, musingly; “he may have motives for silence unknown to you; and as to his never having thought of you, I cannot believe it.”

Fernanda looked up suddenly, watched her cousin’s thoughtful mien intently for a few seconds, and then left the room.

He rose, approached Cyrilla, and said, almost in a whisper: “She imagines him attached to my aunt; I cannot believe anything so preposterous.”

“Whom do you mean?”

“Glaneck.”

“O no; he does not care for any one particularly, and comes here from habit.”

“Others may have done so, but Glaneck is not a man likely to spend day after day here, if it were not either on your account or Fernanda’s; but . . . perhaps he prefers you?”

“Certainly not; if he have a preference it is for her.”

“Then it must be as I have long supposed, and I will find out the state of the case this very evening.”

“O no, pray don’t; you will only make the confusion greater.”

“There will be no confusion at all now.”

“There will, and of the most disagreeable kind. I entreat of you to let the matter rest, and never to speak of it again.”

“Impossible, Cyrilla! If I do, Fernanda will make some inconsiderate marriage that she may repent all the rest of her life. Things of that kind are quite common in our family, though none of us have been supposed deficient in intellect. I could name a dozen Adlerkrons, men and women, who have married in a most inconceivably hasty thoughtless manner: one might really think it were hereditary!”

Cyrilla began to have some misgivings on this subject herself, but she did not attempt to speak until she saw Rupert at the door leading into her aunt’s drawing-room; then she sprang towards him, and laying her hand on his arm, entreated of him to wait a moment—“only one moment.”

“A whole hour if you wish it,” said Rupert, turning back slowly, and watching with some surprise her varying colour.

“I don’t know whether or not I ought to speak. . . . Perhaps it is wrong to betray Fernanda . . . but to prevent unpleasant mistakes, and—and—promote her happiness, I must tell you . . . that . . . I am sure she . . . did not mean . . . did not think of Count Glaneck just now.”

“I am sorry to hear it—Polyak, perhaps?”

“O, no.”

“Who then?”

“I believe . . . I think . . . I . . . am almost sure . . . it was *you*.”

“What!” he exclaimed, drawing her towards the window, and looking inquiringly in her face—“What *do* you mean?”

“I mean that Fernanda likes you,” she answered hurriedly; “and oh, Rupert, if you could”

“N-o, Cyrilla, I can-not. I like Fernanda—like her as you like me—do you understand? And she I trust, feels the same regard for me, but nothing else, I am convinced. How much more probable is it that she who is so rational should have attached herself to Glaneck, whom she has known a whole year, and seen every day, and almost all day, during that time, than to me an acquaintance of a few weeks, of whom she knows little or nothing?”

“But one becomes so intimate with you in a short time,” said Cyrilla; and she added with a slight blush, “and you certainly did at first pay her very marked attention.”

“Not more than I do to any woman who sings well and talks agreeably.”

“I am afraid she was not aware of this habit of yours.”

“The misunderstanding, if there be one,” said Rupert, “arose from her not knowing my luckless attachment to you; but I am still inclined to suspect that Glaneck”

“I assure you,” said Cyrilla, “that he comes here merely to talk to my aunt.”

“Polyak did, I believe,” rejoined Rupert; “but he was still young enough to admire elderly women. Glaneck is long past all that: his regiment leaves in a few weeks. Perhaps he wished to defer an explanation until just before his departure. For a variety of reasons I can imagine that possible . . . I wonder what my aunt will say: she can scarcely object to so unexceptionable a *parti*.”

“You talk as if it were quite a settled thing!”

“I am greatly mistaken if it be not so this evening,” replied Rupert, smiling. “Glaneck, I know, has long been in search of a wife, or, as he amiably expresses it, ‘a mother for his children;’ and, if Fernanda thought old Bockenheim’s proposal worth consideration, she is not likely to refuse a better man. Reserve on her part would be ridiculous, after the very decided declaration of matrimonial intentions that she has just made!”

"Rupert," said Cyrilla reproachfully, "you are laughing at her."

"By no means. She is as *prudent* as I expected to have found you a year ago, when you proved far more romantic than even Melanie herself!"

"You are evidently displeased with us both," said Cyrilla, "and may call me romantic or anything you like; but do not say Fernanda is prudent in a tone and with a look that changes the meaning into worldly."

"Or wise," said Rupert, quietly. "Fernanda will never let her imagination run away with her reason. Her desires are moderate, therefore likely to be fulfilled, and she has every chance of being a contented if not a perfectly happy woman."

At this moment a servant appeared to announce dinner. The doors were widely opened, and the Baroness immediately approached Rupert.

"All right," he said, nodding his head.

"Do you mean that she has given him up altogether?"

"Yes; you may despatch a courier into Salzburg as soon as you please."

"Had you much difficulty?"

"None whatever: she did not care about him. Where is Glaneck? I thought I saw him pass the window just now. Don't say anything to him about Fernanda's having even for an hour intended to accept this proposal."

"Of course not," said the Baroness. "He seemed to be quite astonished at Colonel Bockenheim's effrontery in addressing one of my nieces! Quite annoyed about it, I assure you!"

"I dare say he was."

"And though obliged to return to Salzburg," she continued, "he said that nothing should prevent his coming back to hear the result of my conference with her."

"I am very glad the storm delayed his return until now . . ." said Rupert; and then he stopped, for at the same moment Count Glaneck and Fernanda entered the room by different doors, and they all went to dinner.

The thunder-storm had passed over, and the door and

windows into a rustic verandah were open to admit the cool air, redolent of perfume from the flower garden. Bright sunbeams began to force their way through the trellis and its clinging foliage, seeming to flutter round the massive silver coffee-service which was being arranged in its shade, and Rupert, as he rose from table, exclaimed: "How fresh and gay the garden looks this evening!" then, having walked out, and taken a view of the long variegated plain before him, with the Bavarian mountains rising suddenly at the end of it, in all the distinctness of a clarified atmosphere, he added, "How magnificent! What are parks and pleasure-grounds compared to such a view as this? All the efforts of man to *make* a place sink into insignificance when compared with nature on such a scale."

"A splendid domain without the expense of keeping it in order," observed his aunt, with an appearance of satisfaction. "I can suppose it mine, although my actual property does not extend beyond that low hedge at the end of the garden."

"If you ever feel disposed to sell, let me know," said Rupert.

"You shall have it cheap, if," she added, playfully touching his right hand, "if you will consent to wear a plain gold ring on one of these fingers."

"Eight or ten years hence we will talk about that," answered Rupert, composedly; "and I shall not forget your offer, as I have never seen any place so well adapted for spending a *lune de miel* as this—no long wandering corridors and endless suites of rooms, where people lose each other, but everything nice, compact, and small. The boudoir for moments of sentiment; this verandah for vows of eternal love . . . though I fear that the view from both is so grand, so sublime, that it would serve to remind one continually of the insignificance of oneself, and all one's sayings and doings."

"I never found that the view reminded me of any such thing," said the Baroness. "Our sayings and doings are very often of great importance to ourselves, and not unfre-

quently to others also," she added, glancing towards Cyrilla, who, leaning against the trellis, was twisting a branch of honeysuckle round her wrist. This speech, which was intended as a sort of reproach to Rupert, was followed by a pause, and then she repeated: "Yes; of great importance to others; and if I had known as much as I do now, I would never have allowed Cyrilla to go . . . to Frielands."

"I wish," said Cyrilla, without looking up, "that I were at this moment on the stone balcony there, and Melanie beside me."

"I have heard so much about that balcony," said her aunt, "and the lime-tree walk, and the lake, that if I did not know something of the country in which Frielands is situated, I should have supposed the place a perfect paradise."

"Melanie and Cyrilla contrived to make it very gay," said Rupert; "I have seldom spent six weeks more agreeably than I did there last year."

"And I, never," said Cyrilla.

"But it seems you left all your gaiety and happiness in the balcony and lime-tree walk," said her aunt, pointedly, and returned to us quite a changed being."

"Into the time that has since intervened, all the misery of my whole life has been crowded," said Cyrilla, in a low melancholy voice, quite unconscious of the various constructions put upon her words. Her aunt and Count Glaneck looked towards Rupert, whom they supposed the principal cause of her unhappiness, and seeing that he was apparently altogether engrossed by the preparations for lighting a cigar, they both felt no slight degree of indignation, and the words, "Insensible fellow," very nearly escaped the lips of the good-natured Count.

With all the tranquillity of conscious innocence, Rupert continued his occupation, and then inviting Glaneck to follow his example, began to walk up and down the still wet gravel walks of the garden.

The Baroness looked at the saturated ground, the dripping trees and shrubs, then at her very thin shoes, and hesitated

whether or not she should join them. She was one of those women who find it impossible to imagine that their society can ever be unacceptable—a not uncommon error of those of her sex who have been remarkable for beauty in their youth, but one which makes them excessively troublesome in their later years. On the present occasion, fortunately for Rupert's equanimity, the Baroness heard that Colonel Bockenheim had just arrived, and requested to speak to her. She turned to Fernanda and observed, "Rupert has told me that you have decided on refusing this most unsuitable marriage—I shall manage it in the least offensive way possible, and intend to propose a continuance of Colonel Bockenheim's visits, which will prevent any one from suspecting what has occurred. The less that is said or known about affairs of this kind, when they are not of a brilliant description, the better."

"Under any circumstances, the less said about them the better," answered Fernanda, as her aunt swept past her with an air of importance.

"I hope you really think what you have just said, Fernanda," observed Cyrilla, when they were alone, "as, in that case, I need not fear your displeasure for my silence concerning Rupert."

"You need not fear it, though surprised for a moment, and not agreeably, on consideration I approve of it. I think every woman is bound in honour to preserve a secret of that kind, when a man, by a direct appeal to herself, gives her the power of judging and answering without restraint. I believe—I hope I should have acted in the same way, had I been tried. With a little more experience in these matters, I might have conjectured that you were the attraction that brought and kept Rupert here, but your manner towards him has been so unembarrassed, and so nearly bordering on indifference, that a more observant person than I am might have been deceived."

"Then I deceived while endeavouring to avoid deceit. My object was to prove to Rupert that change of circumstances had produced no change of feelings."

"I suppose you have acted properly," said Fernanda,

“but I have little doubt that time will produce the change he so evidently expects.”

“Time,” said Cyrilla, sorrowfully, “can do nothing but add to my wretchedness.”

“And is it possible you still continue to care for that worthless Zorndorff?” cried Fernanda. “Had I been in your place, I should have hated him long ago.”

“I, too, have thought at times that I almost hated him,” answered Cyrilla, with a sigh, “especially lately.”

“Perhaps,” said Fernanda, bending forwards, and vainly endeavouring to catch her sister’s eye, “perhaps you have lately begun to transfer your regard to Rupert?”

“No, no, no,” cried Cyrilla, quickly; “certainly not—I never thought of such a thing—I would not be guilty of such weakness for any consideration.”

“Guilty!” repeated her sister; “I should think there was neither guilt nor weakness in preferring Rupert to all other men.”

“Oh, of course not . . .”

“That is,” said Fernanda, correcting herself, “until one is married to some one else.”

“The idea of marriage has strongly taken possession of your mind,” observed Cyrilla.

“It has,” replied Fernanda; “and as we are alone, I do not hesitate to confess that I have resolved to accept the next eligible offer, even if but a second edition of Colonel Bockenheim. Had my mother lived, I should have thought and acted differently; but as to spending the best years of my life in the capacity of companion to my aunt, it is a thing to which I will not submit if I can help it. What resource have we then but marriage?”

Cyrilla did not attempt to answer, and Fernanda continued: “Like you, Cyrilla, I have had a short dream of first love, but, more fortunate than you, I have wakened from it quietly and naturally, and nothing remains but a faint recollection of hopes, doubts, and fears, all the creation of my own fancy—nevertheless, it has made me more than ever conscious of my desolate position.”

“You are not more desolate than I am,” said Cyrilla.

“I am,” answered Fernanda; “for I feel myself quite alone in the world.”

“Am I nobody?” asked Cyrilla, forcing a smile; “is my affection worthless?”

“We can be of little use to each other—the very ground beneath us is only ours so long as our aunt permits us to stand on it,” answered Fernanda, bitterly.

“I did not mean that—I only think that as long as our regard for each other continues undiminished, we are not quite desolate.”

“I do not wish to reproach you, Cyrilla; but there is no use in trying to conceal that your affection for me has greatly diminished since your visit to the north of Germany; but you have gained Melanie, and she has a home to offer you! She has never proposed my going to live with her; I do not even know whether or not I am named in those long letters that you receive from her so frequently. I only hope she has not the folly to foster any remnant of interest which you may still feel for Count Zorndorff; it would be most unpardonable, most culpable! Listen to the best advice I can offer you, Cyrilla: banish that false avaricious man from your mind, and turn to Rupert; in promoting his happiness, you will secure your own. Believe me,” she added, while tears started to her eyes, “I say this without any of the worldly motives which you invariably attribute to me.”

“I know it,” answered Cyrilla: “I wish I had never been out of the reach of your advice; it would have saved me incalculable misery.”

“With some resolution and constant employment,” said Fernanda, “I believe that any rational woman can in time overcome a hopeless affection; and in a case such as yours, where the object has proved so unworthy, I can scarcely imagine any difficulty whatever. Such conduct would have been to me a violent uprooting of all regard; and the best remedy is then transplanting it into a better soil.”

“Have none of your plants ever withered and died from uprooting and transplanting?” asked Cyrilla, with a

melancholy smile, as she saw her sister walk towards a collection of exotics, especial objects of her care, but which, having been sunk in the earth for the summer months, had been obliged to bear the brunt of the past storm. Either they had been sufficiently bent and broken to require all her attention, or she wished to end a conversation which was useless and painful; the question remained unanswered, and when Cyrilla saw her little pale hands wandering busily among the wrecks of leaves and blossoms, she turned into the house with a sigh of regret that her interest in such inanimate objects had almost entirely ceased.

Nearly an hour afterwards Rupert found his cousin still occupied with her injured plants. He stood beside her for a few minutes, silently watching her; but, perceiving that she had no intention of either looking up or ceasing her occupation, he observed, in a low voice, "Fernanda, I want to speak to you."

"Speak . . . I can listen to you and tie up these fuchsias at the same time. Did you ever see anything so beautiful as this *fulgens*? the flowers are quite vermilion coloured; and this dear little *microphylla*, still so tiny that the other plants shade it from the wind, and . . ."

"I perceive you are thinking too much of your fuchsias to attend to me," said Rupert; but he bent down with his usual urbanity to examine the plant.

"Cyrilla has told me so much about the gardens at Freilands that I naturally concluded you liked flowers."

"O, so I do . . . but just at present *you* happen to interest me a thousand times more than the gardens at Freilands or anywhere else; and if you will allow me to continue our last conversation . . ."

"No, thank you, Rupert," cried Fernanda, hastily interrupting him, and walking towards the veranda, "I would rather, if possible, forget it altogether. You can easily imagine that the recollection is not agreeable to me."

"Yet I cannot help considering it fortunate," said Rupert, "that you so candidly told me you were resolved to marry as soon as an opportunity offered, in order to

leave my aunt's house. It induced me to seek an explanation with Glaneck just now, which has ended most satisfactorily. If, however, you do not feel equal or inclined to discuss two proposals of marriage in one day, why . . . I can tell him to come a little earlier to-morrow. After having patiently endured the alternations of hope and fear for so many months with a phlegm perfectly inconceivable to me, a few hours more or less can be of little importance to him now."

"I don't . . . understand . . . you," said Fernanda, turning round.

"Glaneck has desired me to make you an offer of his hand in the most approved form. My aunt can scarcely disapprove . . . or you either, if I am not greatly mistaken."

"Rupert . . . Rupert," cried Fernanda, "you have misunderstood me, and misled Count Glaneck!"

"Not I," answered Rupert, "though I may have precipitated matters. He had long made up his mind to ask you to leave Salzburg with him. I say, Fernanda, what *will* my aunt say?"

"I don't know . . . I don't care . . . I . . . but, Rupert, you expect too much from me. I cannot resolve so quickly!"

"Incomprehensible!" exclaimed Rupert. "You hesitate about Glaneck, who has been sincerely attached to you for several months, and can perfectly understand and appreciate you, and would have accepted Bockenheim, who . . ."

"You need not point out the difference to me," said Fernanda, blushing. "I am perfectly aware of it."

"I am sure you are," said Rupert; "and therefore this hesitation on your part surprises me."

"Can you not make allowance for some unwillingness to accept two men in one day?" said Fernanda, trying to laugh, but with difficulty restraining her tears.

"Pshaw! forget Bockenheim altogether," cried Rupert. "You will have enough to think about, I suspect; for Glaneck insists that opposition from my aunt is inevitable, no matter whom you may choose, as she determined, even

before your mother's death, that you should live with her as companion. In fact, she plainly told him so about the time he was beginning to think you would exactly suit him in the same capacity."

Fernanda sat down, and seemed for a few minutes to think profoundly.

"He is waiting for your answer," said Rupert, after a pause.

"I suppose," she said, without looking up, "I ought to confess to him . . . or does he already know . . . ?"

"He knows nothing," replied Rupert; "but I recommend you to be perfectly explicit with him. Concealments on such occasions only lead to future embarrassments and annoyances. He is not unreasonable in his expectations, and I am sure will find in you exactly what he says he desires, — an excellent mother for his children, and an agreeable companion for himself."

"I hope so," said Fernanda, with a decision of tone that perfectly satisfied Rupert, and induced him to make a sign to his friend, who was not far distant, to approach. When Fernanda again looked up, Count Glaneck stood before her; and Rupert, with an exaggerated pretence of silence and precaution, sprang lightly round the corner of the house, and disappeared.





CHAPTER XXV.

THAT was a scene!" cried Rupert the next morning, as soon as he found himself alone with his cousins. "Only prepared for an ordinary storm, we were overwhelmed by a hurricane. Often as I have seen my aunt irritated or angry, anything like what took place last night I never witnessed. My uncle had a habit of teasing her when they were alone, which sometimes led to results rather amusing to me when I was a boy. I have heard, too, of her having had various encounters with her maid of a description bordering on the marvellous. I can imagine them possible—can believe anything now!"

"My uncle's patience must often have been put to the proof," observed Fernanda.

"Not at all, I assure you. To him she was by no means disagreeable,—sometimes even more attentive than he liked; and she always called him 'My Gottfried.' He was attached to her in his own quiet way, too; but her irritability provoked him to amuse himself at the expense of her temper. It was a bad habit that, with all the aptitude of a schoolboy, I learned from him; and so he unconsciously destroyed any feeling of respect which, as a child, I might have acquired for her."

"It would not have outlived your childhood, at all events," said Fernanda. "It is precisely the littlenesses of her character that make her so intolerably unamiable."

"Just so," said Rupert; "for, excepting the occasional

outbursts of wrath, it is hard to say in what her disagreeableness actually consists."

"It is difficult to define, even by those who have suffered from it," rejoined Fernanda; "but as it is said that trifles make the sum of human happiness, I am inclined to think they may also make the sum of human wretchedness. Living with her, one suffers mentally what the inhabitants of the tropics suffer personally from the stings and bites of innumerable insects."

"Not a bad idea; and now that we have abused her to our hearts' content, let us decide upon what is next to be done. That she refused to let you marry Bockenheim was all fair; that she objects to Glaneck appears so outrageously capricious that I can't help trying to discover some motive stronger than the ostensible one of considering herself ill-used or deceived. You must tell me all you know about my uncle's will, as far as you are concerned. I was in Italy when he died, and never saw it, though I remember hearing from his executor on the subject."

"But you know, I suppose," said Fernanda, "that my aunt was so angry at having to give my mother the five thousand Friedrichs d'or bequeathed to her, that for many years she never wrote or took the least notice of us. It was my uncle's executor who informed us that we were to receive the same sum each, if we married with her consent."

"*With* her consent," repeated Rupert. "O, then, it is now quite evident why she will not give it."

"The will was oddly worded," said Fernanda. "I suppose I had better tell you all about it."

"Of course."

She hesitated for a moment, and then said, "In case of your choosing to marry either Cyrilla or . . . or me . . . my aunt is also released from the necessity of paying the five thousand Friedrichs d'or,—a sum of that kind being considered of no consequence to you, and there being so little doubt that you will eventually inherit everything. This clause was certainly made by my uncle, in order to induce her to promote your marriage with Cyrilla."

"Your mother of course considered all this when she consented to remove to Salzburg?"

“Undoubtedly.”

“And you knew it . . . and Cyrilla . . .”

“Cyrilla was purposely kept in ignorance . . .”

“Like the youngest in every family,” said Cyrilla, quietly, “I was considered a child long after I had ceased to be one; but I think I ought to have been told everything before I went to Exfort.”

“It would have made no difference,” said Rupert, thoughtfully. “However,” he added, quickly, “let us not think of what is past . . . we have a long future before us.”

“My future will be a continuation of my present life, without chance of change for some years,” said Cyrilla; “and then . . . perhaps . . . a return to . . . Melanie.”

“Or a removal to me as soon as I become stationary,” said Fernanda.

“You had better consult Count Glaneck before you give invitations,” replied Cyrilla, with a faint smile.

“Let us rather consult him about this provoking will of my uncle’s,” said Rupert.

And they did consult him; and after waiting a few days, and finding the Baroness inexorable, Fernanda, at his request, formally renounced her claim to her uncle’s legacy during her aunt’s lifetime, on condition that she would at least apparently consent to the marriage, and prevent their family dissensions becoming a subject of conversation to all the neighbourhood. Greater sacrifices have often been made for appearance’s sake, but Rupert so continually referred to it—so strenuously insisted on Fernanda’s refusing the Baroness’s paltry presents, and receiving her trousseau altogether from him, that a feeling of discomfort prevailed sufficient to make them all concur in hurrying forward the preparations as much as possible. No one did so more willingly than Justine, the elderly and tyrannical, who, without a word of dissent on the part of Count Glaneck, was to accompany Fernanda to Italy.

During the three succeeding weeks there was a good deal of hurry and agitation in Fernanda’s manner, but she openly and constantly expressed her satisfaction at the prospect of leaving Salzburg, and attended to the minutest

details of her trousseau and toilet in a manner that Rupert pronounced exemplary.

The double marriage-ceremony rendered necessary by the different religions, was a greater trial to Cyrilla than her sister; for as they returned from Salzburg, and found the Protestant clergyman, who had been summoned from Bavaria, waiting for them in the breakfast-room, the recollection of Spa—her own marriage and subsequent misery, nearly overpowered her. Fernanda was perfectly calm. She took leave of her aunt with cold composure, whispered hopes of reunion to Cyrilla; but, as Rupert accompanied her down stairs, her fortitude suddenly forsook her, and tears, as plentiful as ever were shed by parting bride, fell from her eyes while vainly endeavouring to articulate a few words of thanks; he answered, laughingly, considering it quite natural, proper, and a matter of course, that her handkerchief should be in requisition until the carriage had turned the corner of the street.

No sooner had her sister driven from the door than a feeling of utter loneliness and dismay took possession of Cyrilla; and when Rupert approached to take leave, she yielded to a violent burst of grief, that surprised as much as it affected him. Endeavouring to console her in what he considered the most judicious manner, he assured her that Glaneck was the best fellow in the world; that Fernanda would lead quite a jolly sort of life for the next few years, and even if they did get into bad quarters, they had interest and money enough to effect an exchange into another regiment, &c. &c. &c., and then he kissed her forehead and left her . . . as unconscious as she herself that more than half the bitter tears for which he felt so much compassion might have been placed to his own account—but so it was. His boundless generosity to her sister—his unwearied kindness to herself, and good-humoured patience with her reserve—his cheerfulness and merry laughter, so strongly contrasting with the growing gloom and ill-temper of her aunt, had not failed to make a lasting impression on her. The very restraint which she had considered necessary to impose on herself in her intercourse with him, had given an importance not only to

his most trifling words and actions, but also to her own as far as they concerned him, and he had thus naturally become a prominent object—a subject of incessant thought and speculation.

His absence caused a dreary blank in her existence, which, however, she attributed wholly to the loss of her sister, and persisted in her self-deception so far as to ascribe the greater portion of her uneasiness to the unselfish fear that Fernanda might entertain recollections of Rupert that would interfere with her happiness; and she received many letters from her sister before she allowed herself to be convinced that further anxiety on her account would be absurd.

Then it was that she began to expect a return of at least that degree of peace of mind or resignation which she had acquired before Rupert's visit—instead of it, she felt herself daily becoming more and more impatient of the bonds that bound her. It was in vain she sought to dispel her cares in the society of their now constant visitor, Mademoiselle Bockenheim. The young lady was of the very commonest description of garrison town belle, and Cyrilla was soon tired of hearing of the officers, their sayings and doings, speculations as to who could or would marry, and wild definitions of the passion or sentiment of love, remarkable for nothing but their endless variety. At length, in a fit of unconquerable despondency, she wrote to Melanie requesting her to enter into negotiations with Zorndorff, and to use all her influence to find out from him, if it were not possible, privately, to annul a marriage so privately contracted.

The answer was, that he declined speaking on the subject to any one excepting Cyrilla herself, and from Melanie a pressing invitation to return to Exfort. To this she would not consent without some explicit declaration from Zorndorff—and this he avoided; while his messages were of an ambiguity calculated to keep alive her hopes, and induce her to continue a correspondence which he ardently desired, as the only attainable means of obtaining even indirect communication with her, and in the hope of preserving the interest which he never for a moment doubted she still felt in everything that concerned him.



CHAPTER XXVI.



YRILLA'S life for more than a year and a half was of the most monotonous description that can be well imagined,—not the respectable and satisfactory monotony of a succession of domestic duties in the fulfilment of which, while promoting her own happiness, she could essentially conduce to that of others,—but in the insipid pleasures and vain pursuits of the world. To her aunt a constant round of luxurious dissipation, a continual pursuit of amusement, had become second nature; and as the winter approached, Cyrilla was slowly and unwillingly drawn into the same mode of life that she had formerly found so fascinating, but which no longer possessed for her a single charm,—not all the attention and adulation now offered her could for a moment make her forget her blighted hopes or cheerless future,—they served, however, to raise her in the estimation of her aunt, who enjoyed to a certain degree the reflection of her popularity, and was proportionably contented and free from her usual cloudiness of aspect.

The succeeding summer wore away in painful recollections and useless regrets; the winter followed,—and, without one friend or companion whose society could save her from the apathy which had begun to pervade both mind and body, she was again preparing to commence another tiresome carnival, when once more Rupert surprised them with a visit. No magic wand ever produced a more complete change than his presence caused in that gloomy house: the inhabitants seemed suddenly enlivened, the

Baroness became almost hospitable, the old walls echoed to the sound of revelry, the mirrors reflected masks and pageants, Cyrilla's eyes brightened and the colour returned to her cheek, again she danced without complaining of fatigue, no day was too cold for sledging, no walk too long, if Rupert were of the party; there was an alacrity about the servants, a visible wish to be employed, though ever so remotely, in his service, the very dogs snarled less, and the parrot was loquacious from sympathy, and without the usual bon-bon bribes.

It was remarkable that though Rupert still professed to think the Austrian officers the pleasantest companions imaginable, he seldom or never sought their society; but, after having gravely informed his aunt that his habits had become singularly domestic of late, he, to her infinite satisfaction, spent the greater part of each morning either in her drawing-room, or in a little apartment with a single window and northern aspect, which his cousin had converted into a studio. Cyrilla's pleasure on seeing him had been too great for concealment. So long without friend or companion, what could be more natural than that she should be insensibly drawn into frequent and interesting conversations; and, excepting on one subject, which was never approached by him, they could speak without the slightest reserve. He sat beside her when she worked, near her when she painted; and, while trying to persuade herself that he had ceased to think of her otherwise than as a cousin, she supposed it unnecessary to avoid his society, as she had done during his former visit, and Rupert required a very short time to discover that, by degrees, he might claim her time and attention altogether. Quietly and imperceptibly he assumed the place assigned him by his aunt, ceded to him by others, and as in such cases is usual. It was nearly the same thing whether they were at home or abroad, inclination and the considerate non-interference of all their acquaintance alike facilitated their intercourse, and induced them to become almost exclusively occupied with each other. It was considered a settled affair, to which no one had any right to object, and soon even ceased to be a subject of discussion.

At length, Rupert's leave of absence drew to a close; and he announced his intention of returning to Exfort, where his regiment had already been some time in garrison.

"You will, of course, have some explanation with Cyrilla before you leave," said his aunt.

"Yes; I think I shall advise her to return to Exfort as soon as possible. She said the other day that she wished to do so."

"With you, perhaps?"

"I did not exactly mean that; but if you have no objection, I'm sure I have none. I thought, for propriety's sake, we should have required some one, like old Justine, with us; in case, however, that you consider Ursula an eligible travelling companion, *we* shall make no difficulties whatever. I have even little doubt of being able to persuade Cyrilla to leave to-morrow!"

"But, Rupert, you misunderstand me—completely,—and, what is worse—poor Cyrilla too. Surely you cannot any longer be blind to her attachment?"

"Our relationship is so near, that it is difficult to ascertain what degree of regard she may have bestowed on me"

"This is a base subterfuge, unworthy of an Adlerkron!" exclaimed his aunt.

"Strong language," said Rupert, laughing. "You will compel me to run the chance of being refused."

"She dare not refuse!" cried his aunt, going towards the door; "she must not even demur"

"Stay!" cried Rupert; "I will have no compulsion on either side. Just leave me to manage my own affairs, will you," he added, as he passed her, and walked slowly and thoughtfully through the suite of rooms at the end of which was Cyrilla's little studio. Having found that oil-painting, with its absorbing interests, was the most effectual means of banishing her painful reminiscences, she had latterly spent hours at her easel. The subjects of her paintings were chiefly views of the surrounding country, which, contrary to her usual habits, she finished carefully, as they were destined to serve as contributions to the different charities

in the neighbourhood ; and she felt a sort of satisfaction in the idea that her time was not altogether misspent, for the paintings soon found purchasers, and the sums obtained for them were by no means inconsiderable. Accustomed to Rupert's visits, she did not even look up as he entered. A nice observer might have perceived a slight flush pass across her face as she bent over her palette : she herself was conscious that her hand had lost its steadiness ; and, while Rupert sat down silently on the old-fashioned sofa, she rose, threw aside her painting-wrapper, and, without looking at him, asked his opinion of her "cloud on mountain."

"Very pretty—extremely natural."

"You are not looking at it, and I rather expect you to say something civil about the smoke of my burning weeds close to the lake. I wish you had been with us last summer when I made the sketch ; I dare say the Hinter lake would have appeared quite different had I seen it with you !"

"Indeed ? And what difference would my presence have made ?"

"You would have lent me your bright coloured glasses to look through."

"Literally or metaphorically ?" asked Rupert.

"Both," replied Cyrilla, smiling ; "I intend you to give me those coloured glasses when you are about to leave Salzburg."

"Then they will be yours to-night—for I return to Exfort to-morrow."

"I thought you said . . . you had . . . applied for prolonged leave of absence ?"

"Stauffen has written to request me to return without delay, as he wishes to go to his father who is ill."

"I do wish you would leave the army, Rupert ; it seems such an unnecessary constraint that you put upon your actions."

"Perhaps so ; but as it is, at the same time, my profession, occupation, and, at present, my chief subject of interest, you must offer to give me an equivalent if I give it up. I am, however, quite ready to capitulate . . ."

"I don't understand you."

"You wish me to leave the army—I will do so on certain conditions—the first is, that you return forthwith to Exfort."

"O, most willingly, most gladly," she exclaimed, eagerly, "it would be dreadful to remain here now without you; and as Melanie will probably spend the greater part of the summer at Freilands, Exfort has lost half its terrors for me . . . but do you think my aunt will consent?"

"She will, if you agree to my second stipulation, which will save her precisely the sum of five thousand Friedrichs d'or! I believe that is what my uncle decreed that you or Fernanda should pay for me?"

"Oh, Rupert, say any thing but that," cried Cyrilla, interrupting him hastily; "it cannot be . . . I dare not listen to you."

"Surely you are jesting, Cyrilla. You cannot all this time have been amusing yourself at my expense?" he paused for an answer, waited for a look, a gesture, in vain. Cyrilla, pale as death, stood silently beside the sofa, her eyes fixed on the ground with an expression of the deepest anguish.

"Now, then," he continued, slightly frowning, "you *must* listen to me. When two years ago you answered as you have done now, I felt pained and sorry, but not angry with *you*, though a little with myself, for having mistaken this same liking, as you call it, for love. I had also, by my foolish remarks about relationship, prevented you from thinking of me; but this is no longer the case. If you indeed merely like me, I must say you have lately acted with unparalleled coquetry. If your motive for inducing me to remain here has been mere vanity, or a selfish desire to be relieved from the tedium of my aunt's society, it is quite unpardonable; for you have been at the same time trifling with my happiness, acting with the greatest duplicity,—*acting*, that is the word, you have acted—played a part—pretended to love. I am ashamed," he added vehemently, "ashamed to think of the manner in which I have wasted my time here, watching for such worthless looks and smiles, and listening to such heartless assurances of esteem!"

“Oh, Rupert . . . spare me . . . I did not mean it . . . I . . . I cannot help liking you . . . so much . . . oh, so very much!”

“Hang your liking,” he cried impetuously, starting from his seat, “it is love and not liking that I want.”

“But if I say love—you will expect me to—to marry you.”

“Most undoubtedly,” he answered, with a heightened colour, a look of uncertainty, and then a sudden smile, as he once more placed himself beside her.

“I cannot . . . I dare not . . . the very thought is wrong,” cried Cyrilla, anxiously.

“What on earth do you mean?” asked Rupert; and then he added slowly, “If Zorndorff were still unmarried, I could suspect—I might imagine that you had some engagement with him.”

Cyrilla turned away her head and remained silent.

“So,” continued Rupert reproachfully, “though he has notoriously bartered his handsome person for money—though he forgot the vows I have no doubt he made you—though he is the husband of another woman—you love him still!”

“Oh no, no, no,” cried Cyrilla, in great agitation.

“Then you have chosen some one else, and have been using me as a blind . . . this is perfectly insufferable!”

“No, Rupert, no. I am not so worthless as you suppose. I have been weak but not wicked . . . Oh, be still my dear kind cousin; have patience with me, and pardon me if you can.”

“When I feel less than I do just now,” he answered bitterly, “I may perhaps be able to do so; for the present you must allow me to decline the continuance of an intimacy that can bring me nothing but mortification and disappointment. You may be quite sure,” he added, bestowing an angry glance on her pale cheek and quivering lip, “that I shall henceforward avoid meeting you until I can see you with the indifference—you deserve.”

As he strode quickly through the doorway, Cyrilla stood up, pressed her hands tightly together, struggled violently

with her grief, until she supposed him out of hearing, and then burying her face in the cushion of the sofa, wept as she had done but once before in her life; her suppressed sobs shook her whole frame, and it was some time before she became conscious that an arm was clasped round her, which gently endeavoured to raise her from her wretchedness. "Cyrilla, darling," whispered Rupert, "forgive me; I have been ungenerous—unkind—I ought not to have thought of myself . . . of what consequence is my happiness compared to yours!"

"Oh, Rupert," cried Cyrilla passionately, "do not leave me . . . if you forsake me I shall be utterly friendless."

"Forsake you . . . dear love, I never thought of such a thing! Shall I write to Stauffen and tell him he must wait a few weeks longer? or will you let Melanie know that she may come herself or send for you?"

"Oh, take me away from this place," cried Cyrilla, as with still streaming eyes, and unsteady hand, she drew a letter from her pocket. "Let me again see looks of affection, and hear words of kindness; take me to Melanie . . . This letter," she continued, with a slight blush, "is from her, and very long. I should rather not read it to you; but here are a few lines enclosed from the President, containing a most kind and pressing invitation. I did not think he could feel so warmly towards any one."

"You don't know him," said Rupert, "how could you?—his own wife is scarcely acquainted with him."

"She is afraid of him," rejoined Cyrilla; "in fact, so am I, and so is every one in his house; but I would rather live with him than with my aunt. His letter has convinced me that he likes me, and wishes my return; and, though he is a severe man, he is not ill-tempered or tiresome about trifles . . . but why should I not tell the truth, and say at once I wish for Melanie's society, and a continuance of your affection."

"You shall have it," cried Rupert, warmly; "and without any selfish alloy in future: never will I forget that I am your cousin, and *only* your cousin; never again shall you hear a word which might imply that I ever had wished it otherwise."

Cyrilla blushed so deeply, that she turned quite away from him.

“But,” continued Rupert, “you too must change your manner, or we shall never get on. I am not vainer than other men, I believe, but I am neither a stock nor a stone; and if you blush or grow pale every time I speak to you, as you have done lately, why . . . I cannot help thinking that, after all, you do like me better than people generally like their cousins.”

“And if I did, it would be of little avail, bound as I am”

“Bound!” exclaimed Rupert; “how so?”

“In a way that I cannot explain, though I think it my duty to tell you of it.”

“But not to Zorndorff . . . surely not to Zorndorff?” cried Rupert, anxiously.

“Unfortunately, yes; and by vows from which he alone can make me free.”

“His marriage must have released you from any promise you may have made him,” said Rupert, quickly.

Cyrilla shook her head.

“He has evidently taken some ungenerous advantage of your inexperience,” continued Rupert; “but I will go to him, insist on an explanation, and”

“Stay,” cried Cyrilla, interrupting him; “if you speak in this way, you will make me deeply regret my partial confession, and prevent me from ever speaking to you again about this deplorable and sole impediment to our union.”

“*Sole* impediment!” he repeated, joyfully.

“No, no; I did not mean to say that . . . I”

“Do not retract,” said Rupert, smiling; “but let me suppose that some religious or moral scruple is all that separates us in future.”

“Would that it were only a scruple,” answered Cyrilla, with a sigh. “Melanie writes in this letter, that Count Zorndorff seems of late more disposed to relent, and she thinks he might be induced to release me were I, as he requires, to apply personally to him. This is a refinement of cruelty of which I did not think him capable.”

“I might have guessed that something of this kind had occurred,” cried Rupert, bitterly. “I might have known that no woman could interest him, without suffering in some way or other! Will you not allow me to insist on his releasing you from this promise, which most probably would only be considered binding by a person of extraordinary probity?”

“No, Rupert, you must leave all that to me; interference on your part can only serve to increase my difficulties.”

“But,” began Rupert, “it may be my duty, as your nearest relation, to”

“It will never be your duty, for you can only injure me. Promise to preserve my secret, let what will happen, or I never can never dare speak to you about him again.”

Rupert hesitated.

“Promise,” cried Cyrilla, beseechingly, “promise, or you compel me to remain here, and resign my last chance of happiness.”

Rupert promised, most unwillingly, and, after a pause, said slowly: “You are aware, Cyrilla, that a marriage is sufficient to annul all previous engagements.”

“I know it does in most cases, though not in mine. Do not ask me any questions, but get my aunt to consent to my return to Exfort without delay.”

“I can promise her joyful acquiescence if you will consent to an engagement with me.”

“But” began Cyrilla, turning deadly pale.

“Don’t look so terrified, you inexplicable girl,” cried Rupert, laughing; “I understand perfectly that for the present it is merely conditional. I do not intend even to speak of it to you for three months, or ask your final decision for six! Can any thing be more liberal than that?”

“No, certainly,” murmured Cyrilla; “but suppose he should refuse after all to”

“He cannot refuse,” cried Rupert, indignantly, “that is, if he have human feelings, and hitherto I have considered him a gentlemanlike kind of villain. Now that I

see you can speak of him calmly, I must tell you how much I regret not having known that he was actually betrothed to Mademoiselle de Sommerfeld when we were at Freilands; it might have prevented you from making rash promises."

"You said enough to warn me," replied Cyrilla. "Melanie had not heard of it, and when we spoke to him on the subject, he in some way evaded our questions, and gave me to understand that only his father desired the marriage, and that on her inheriting her brother's fortune, he had written to say, that the disparity in their circumstances was greater than he could endure, and so the supposed engagement had ended."

"But," said Rupert, "he forgot to tell you that this enormous increase of fortune did not become intolerable to him until he had seen you. It was several months after her brother's death, in fact the evening he left Freilands, that he wrote, or rather despatched this remarkable letter. I remember his saying, that he had one ready for date and seal in his writing desk . . . he waited until he had spoken to you before he sent it off."

"I am afraid you are right," said Cyrilla, thoughtfully; "I was blinded—infatuated at that time, in a manner which appears quite incomprehensible to me now."

"I suspect Melanie tied the bandage over your eyes," observed Rupert.

"Not so," replied Cyrilla; "but she has since endeavoured to keep it there."

"Then it is better you should hear the whole truth from me, and on your account I was sufficiently interested in this affair to make minute inquiries. From the time that old Sommerfeld retired from his bank, he and his family were seldom in Berlin. People said that his daughter was inclined to somnambulism, sleepwaking, nervous attacks, and all that sort of thing; there was a good deal of mystery about her altogether, and she was long very dangerously ill. When Zorndorff married her, he certainly did not expect her to live as she is now likely to do."

Cyrilla shuddered.

“He ought to have told you the true state of the case,” continued Rupert; “and though it would have been bad enough breaking off an engagement of so many years’ standing, still that monstrous increase of fortune was a gentlemanly sort of excuse that I can understand; and as they say he never cared for her, and had been from the first wholly actuated by motives of interest, I cannot imagine her being so weak as to insist on a marriage, if he had told her honestly that he liked some one else better. I have reason, however, to believe that he entered into no explanation whatever; but satisfied his conscience or his inclinations by treating her with such remarkable neglect and coldness, that it almost became evident he wished to provoke a quarrel—instead of which, she bore his ill usage with exemplary patience, and never complained, though it is said she had a return of sleeping fits, or fainting fits, in consequence.”

“I heard also,” said Cyrilla, “that he had some terrible scenes with his father.”

“Why yes; the General got into a rage, and said, if he were not his son, he should consider it his duty to shoot him. But it was not that, or the fear of being shot by any one, that moved Zorndorff; it was old Sommerfeld’s consenting to settle his whole fortune in reversion on him, in case his daughter should die childless; add to this the apparently dying state of the daughter, and Zorndorff’s inordinate longing for wealth, and you will comprehend that he sold himself less unwillingly than Melanie has thought proper to let you know.”

“And you call this gentlemanlike villany?” said Cyrilla in a low voice.

“It is, at least, the sort of villany most commonly practised by those denominated noblemen and gentlemen; they often sell themselves, perhaps a little less notoriously than Zorndorff; and as to engagements, one sees the most publicly contracted broken off. Now, you must remember that yours with him was not public, not known at all in fact, though it may have been suspected by a few. I—a—suppose I may take it for granted that you have altogether ceased to care for him?”

"You may," replied Cyrilla, with a firmness that made Rupert suspect some other feeling had replaced the affection that had caused her so much sorrow.

"You were so very young," said Rupert, "that it was scarcely to be expected the impression made would be sufficiently strong to bear, not only absence, but faithlessness; that Zorndorff thought so too is evident, or he would never have exacted a promise from you, which seems to have been of an unusually solemn description."

Cyrilla did not speak—she could not, and Rupert continued: "I have now little doubt that he hoped to bind you by a religious vow or moral obligation, in order to constrain you to await his wife's death. Can you submit to a continuance of such a position?" He paused, Cyrilla still remained silent, and he added, "My aunt is waiting to hear the result of our conference—you must allow me to hint at a marriage in perspective, if you wish to part amicably from her."

"But—but—remember we have no engagement whatever—never forget that, Rupert—I cannot—must not—dare not . . ."

"O, I understand—we understand each other at last, I hope. Leave everything to me now, and don't attempt any kind of explanation with my aunt."

As he soon after entered the drawing-room with unusual gravity, the Baroness looked up impatiently, and called out, "Well?—you have been so long absent that I really began to imagine that foolish girl had dared to make difficulties."

"She makes none about going to Exfort."

"But about your marriage?"

"O, pray don't trouble yourself," said Rupert, with affected carelessness; "there is no necessity for being in a hurry—Cyrilla and I agree perfectly on that point—we think that, no unforeseen obstacles occurring, in about a year or so it may come off."

"Come off?"

"Yes—and be got up with all imaginable splendour."

The Baroness rose with unusual impetuosity, and in a

harsh voice, which echoed through the long suite of apartments, called Cyrilla. She came slowly and unwillingly, cast an anxious glance towards Rupert, who, leaning back in a chair, answered it by a look of intelligence that greatly re-assured her. "I hope," said her aunt, frowning, "I hope you are not the cause of this absurd and most unnecessary delay?"

"It is neither absurd nor unnecessary," interposed Rupert. "I do not choose to be hurried on so very important an occasion; and as you are so ungrateful for my recent obedience to your commands, I retract the promise which I was disposed to make to Cyrilla half an hour ago, and altogether decline being bound by any sort of engagement!"

"Rupert!" cried his aunt, reproachfully, "if you only knew how much your uncle desired this connexion?"

"You ought to have told me that two years ago," he answered, "and of his queer will too—he might just as well never have named my cousins, as to have left them so completely in your power!"

"How you harp on that detestable subject, Rupert!"

"The manner in which poor dear Fernanda has been done out of her little fortune for so many years is perfectly scandalous!"

"She deserved it, for carrying on a system of deception in my house for nearly ten months," said the Baroness, who, with the facility possessed by most people, had discovered a plausible mode of justification, not only to others but to herself,—"*that* was scandalous!"

"But I have told you twenty times she never thought of Glaneck until the evening you were informed of it. Surely the affair with Bockenheim must make it evident to you?"

"No," said his aunt, "nothing will ever make it evident to me; so let us say no more about the matter. As to Cyrilla, she shall not leave my house or protection without being engaged to you; so if you wish to see her at Exfort, you had better put this ring on her finger, and . . ." She drew one from hers as she spoke.

“By no means,” said Rupert, waving his hand. “I should be ashamed to offer her such a hideous paltry thing as that—give me the diamond and I shall have no objection to bestow it on her; it will better represent the five thousand Friedrich d’or, which she must lose one way or the other, it seems.”

“I cannot give you this ring,” said the Baroness, “it was your uncle’s first present to me.”

“Then Cyrilla must wait until I can find something fit for me to offer and for her to accept. You will wait, Cyrilla—won’t you?”





CHAPTER XXVII.

IT so happened that the evening Cyrilla arrived at Exfort there was a ball at the President's. The blaze of light and warm air on the staircase cheered her, and her sister's enthusiastic and the President's cordial welcome so raised her spirits, that at the request of the latter she gave up, without much effort, her intention of remaining in her own room, even after having ascertained that a meeting with Zorndorff would be the consequence.

"In fact," said Melanie, "the sooner you get over this first dreaded interview the better; to shun him altogether is impossible, for he is often here, and I dare not make any objection, you know; but he has too much tact to annoy or embarrass you in any way, and you may be sure whatever line of conduct he may adopt will be correct."

"Don't you think I may at least avoid speaking to him in the first instance?"

"I fear—not."

"What sacrifices one must make to deceive the world!" exclaimed Cyrilla.

"That was not exactly what I meant," said Melanie. "I think it would be very injudicious to irritate Edouard just now, when his wife is beginning to recover her health, and there is at last some prospect of his repairing his injustice to you as far as he can; but I am inclined to think you will find it difficult to have any communication with him, even if you desire it, as, when he is not actually engaged in his office, Margaret scarcely ever allows him out of her sight. He seemed greatly annoyed lately by

her having had a private staircase made from her rooms to his study, where he says she lies on the sofa for hours without speaking or requiring him to speak to her, but following all his movements in the most distracting manner with her unearthly eyes !”

“ But he likes her now,” interposed Cyrilla, “ and she is young and handsome—you mentioned in one of your letters that she was considered very handsome.”

“ Some people think her so. In her own house, which is furnished with a magnificence scarcely common in palaces, she always makes me think of the descriptions of oriental princesses—Edouard receives her guests, and, in a room with shaded lamps, she is generally to be found reclining on a divan, and enjoying to the fullest extent the privileges of a confirmed invalid ; latterly, however, she has been more inclined to exert herself, goes out occasionally, and people here begin to say that after all she is merely hypochondriacal !”

“ And you, what do you think ?” asked Cyrilla eagerly.

“ I—don’t—know exactly,” answered Melanie, “ for I have been on too bad terms with Edouard to have seen enough of her to be able to judge ; but she interests me greatly, as, from all I have heard, I am inclined to think that she belongs to the highest class of sensitives, and is little inferior in acuteness to the true somnambulists, though she requires mesmeric passes to produce sleep-waking. Edouard is extremely guarded when speaking of her, and I have only latterly occasionally been present while she was being mesmerized.”

“ The next time you see him alone . . .” began Cyrilla.

“ That,” said Melanie, “ is an event of rare occurrence now. I cannot send for him as in former times ; and it was only the day I last wrote to you that, after nearly two years of estrangement, he came voluntarily to see me, asked to renew our former intimacy, spoke of you, and seemed so shocked at the account I gave him of your joyless life in Salzburg.”

“ And you have seen him again, I hope ?” cried Cyrilla.

“ Yes, but without having had an opportunity of speaking

to him alone. I intend, however, to begin to visit Margaret regularly every day, and Edouard cannot always be absent or engaged when I am there."

A message from the President recalled Melanie to the drawing-room, where Cyrilla, when dressed, vainly endeavoured to summon up the necessary courage to follow her. Fruitless were all her efforts to reason herself out of the agitation which seemed every moment to increase; and, at the end of an hour, she was still walking uneasily up and down the apartment when her sister again entered it, drew her arm within hers, and silently led her towards the rooms, whence the sound of music and the murmur of voices had long reached her anxious ear.

"But one word, Melanie," cried Cyrilla, stopping just as the servants, on seeing them approach, prepared to throw open the doors: "but one word. Tell me, as exactly as you can remember, what he said about me; let me know the very words—you can scarcely imagine their terrible importance to me now."

"He said that some circumstances had come to his knowledge which might, in the course of time, enable him to repair his injustice without the publicity we had so much reason to dread."

"That is quite enough to make me avoid doing or saying anything likely to irritate him," said Cyrilla taking a long breath. "I could even forgive him all the suffering he has caused me if he would only make me free, as I was when I first entered this house." She moved on a few steps—hesitated—and then added, with some embarrassment, "Just tell me, Melanie . . . is he near the door . . . must I be close to him all at once?"

"No, dear, he is in the ball-room: I waited until he had gone there before I came for you. Be courageous, and do not let Wilhelm or any one perceive a shadow of change in your manner," she whispered, as they entered the drawing-room, where Cyrilla was immediately surrounded by all her former acquaintances. The Belle-gardes declared she was enormously improved, *d'une beauté ravissante*: they thought her hair had grown darker,

and they could almost fancy her considerably taller than she had been two or three years ago!

"I'm sure Cyrilla ought to be extremely flattered at your remembering her height so accurately," said Melanie; "and in fact you are quite right;—for during the long and dangerous illness after her mother's death, she grew in a very remarkable manner."

"I really had no idea she was so very youthful," cried Julie de Lindesmar, laughing; "but pray, dear Cyrilla, remain just as you are now, as any change must be for the worse. You cannot imagine how enchanted we are to have you here again, or how much pleasure we anticipate when you and Melanie are again at Freilands. Rupert has had the theatre there finished; and we intend to get up tableaux, comedies, perhaps even an opera! Virginie is coming to us for the summer with her little boy. You heard of poor De Rubigny's untimely death? I told Melanie to write to you about it—very shocking, wasn't it? But, after all, there never were two people so little suited to each other!"

"I am surprised that Virginie did not return home immediately," said Cyrilla.

"She could not,—her child was ill, and there were some unpleasant debts; but I can explain all that some other time,—let us think of nothing but gaiety at present,—Rupert has promised us all sorts of festivities."

"I hope," observed Madame de Bellegarde, "that the 'genial south' has not made you incapable of enjoying our less attractive world here?"

"O, not at all; you have no idea how I longed to return to Exfort."

"Indeed! Then it is not true that the south of Germany is so much more beautiful, and the people so much gayer, than in the north?"

"The country is very magnificent," answered Cyrilla, "and the mass of the people are, I believe, more inclined to mirth and lead a gayer life than here; but I believe in our class there is a great similarity all over Europe; and, for my own part, my happiness so completely depends on

the *persons* about me, that places interest me exactly in proportion to the pleasurable associations they produce. The rose-coloured room, lime-tree walk, and balcony at Freilands, are dearer to me than all the villas, mountains, lakes, and waterfalls in the neighbourhood of Salzburg."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Melanie; "and I, little as I know of mountain scenery, can never forget the impression it made on me."

"I can easily imagine that," said Cyrilla, "and allow that I prefer such scenery to all others; but painful experience has taught me to admire a beautiful country as I do beautiful people,—I like to sketch or paint them, but would willingly dispense with either or both to obtain a moderate portion of domestic happiness."

"Good gracious, how wise she has grown!" cried Madame de Bellegarde, raising her lorgnette to examine Cyrilla's dress.

"She is right," observed the President, who was standing near them, and seemed to listen to Cyrilla's words and watch her movements with peculiar interest; "quite right. Domestic happiness should ever be considered of the first importance by a woman."

"But surely," said Melanie deprecatingly, "you will at least allow us to admire the beauties of nature?"

"O, certainly; and at no time are they so striking as at an early hour in the morning, and then Cyrilla enjoys them, I know." He turned to appeal to her for a corroboration of his remark, and to remind her of her matutinal walks at Freilands, when he observed Rupert approach, and, without speaking, lead her towards the ball-room. The President followed: he wished to witness her meeting with Zorndorff, who stood with his wife near the entrance; he saw his nephew's furtive glance, and then averted head, while Cyrilla, hurrying on with the crowd, passed him, apparently unmoved.

It is a fine thing that fear of the "world's dread laugh." More often than is suspected has it given the cowardly man strength to conceal his weakness. Still more frequently has it enabled a timid woman to hide her wounded

feelings and suffocating palpitation under an appearance of unconcern. Other eyes besides the President's were fixed curiously on Cyrilla at that moment, but no one perceived a change that could be noted. Rupert himself was surprised. That she pressed forward with unusual eagerness might be from a wish to dance; that she spoke rather confusedly, and looked round her a little wildly for a few minutes, might be in consequence of the numerous well-known faces that nodded and made other familiar signs of recognition from every part of the room. But even that soon ceased, and she talked to him with all her usual self-possession, quietly requesting him to avoid naming Zorndorff to her for a day or two, and to remember his promise not to ask any further explanation during the next three months. When assuring her that he had not forgotten their agreement, he laughingly requested permission to use his eyes and ears in case an opportunity should occur for obtaining information; and then looked towards Zorndorff, and observed that his eyes had followed Cyrilla with an expression of deep interest, while she altogether avoided looking near the part of the room where she knew he was standing; but when the music ceased, and they once again were close to each other, Zorndorff's eyes sought the ground, and remained fixed there with what Rupert imagined an instinctive feeling that this time Cyrilla must see him, and that he dared not meet her glance. Without directly looking at him, she had on both occasions seen him; and, finding herself unexpectedly detained by the crowd in his neighbourhood, she took refuge in a chair just behind the door-way where he stood, and as Rupert leaned against the wall beside her, they heard the following dialogue:—

“So she is our aunt Melanie's sister! And this is the Cyrilla who reads and sings so beautifully! Is she not a sort of relation of ours?”

“None whatever.”

“Connection, I ought perhaps to say.”

“It scarcely deserves the name.”

“Whether or not, I must know her, and you shall make us acquainted with each other.”

“Excuse me, Margaret ; I would rather not.”

“And why so? We shall see her here, and she will be invited to our house as a matter of course. I *must* know her. I . . . I wish to know her more than any one I ever saw.”

“You will not suit each other in the least.”

“There you are mistaken, Edouard. I have seen a face like hers in dream or vision, and lately, too. There is affinity—elective attraction—between us!”

“There is none on her side, I can assure you. You will soon perceive that she has no wish whatever to know you.”

“I shall perceive no such thing. Why should she refuse to be my friend, if I entreat her to have compassion on my suffering nerves! I know that the emanations from a being so young, so pure, so . . .”

“For heaven’s sake, Margaret, don’t get excited! Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron is not at all likely to feel the interest you suppose, and you will only be annoyed and disappointed.”

“Yet she looked at me as she passed . . . almost . . . as if she . . . already knew me. She has heard of me, Edouard, I am convinced.”

No answer.

“There was meaning in her glance . . . and in mine, too, perhaps . . . for she turned away.”

This was true. The eager flashing of her eyes had made a disagreeable impression on Cyrilla.

“Dr. Hurtig says,” she continued, “that the society of the young and healthy is necessary to my well-being, and where can I find these qualities in so attractive a form? Bring us together, Edouard, and let me imbibe from her those salutary emanations which are lost on others, but might confer health and happiness on me!”

“If you talk to her in this way, she will think you mad.”

Cyrilla rose, and as she walked away with Rupert, whispered, “*Is* she mad?”

“No, I believe she is only nervous or hypochondriacal ; though some people say she is a demi-somnambulist. At

all events, she furnishes constant subject of conversation here; and Melanie finds her so mysteriously interesting that I am surprised she did not write to you about her."

"I did not feel any curiosity . . . I mean to say, I did not choose to hear anything concerning her."

"You will scarcely be able to avoid seeing or hearing of her every day now," observed Rupert.

"I am sure," cried Madame de Bellegarde, drawing Cyrilla towards a *causeuse*, "I am quite sure you two are talking of Margaret Zorndorff, the greatest acquisition that our neighbourhood has received for many years!"

"Indeed! I should scarcely have supposed so. She talks oddly; and, though very handsome, is the most unearthly-looking woman I ever saw."

"Well, *ma chère*, that is just what I mean. Earthly people are to be found every day, but a woman who walks about in a waking dream, who sees people's souls in their right eyes, their bodily diseases in their left . . ."

"Nonsense, Adrienne!"

"Fact, I assure you . . . and little blue flames in the eyes of animals, which she says are their souls. No, I am wrong; we women have the blue souls—flames, I mean."

"Then, after all, she is a little crazy," said Cyrilla, too much grieved at what she had heard to join in her companion's senseless laughter.

"Crazy! not at all. I have heard her, when induced by her husband to forget herself and her nerves, talk as rationally as either you or I could do."

"I wonder he does not try to make her always do so."

"So he does; and is sometimes dreadfully annoyed with us when we encourage her in her absurdities. I assure you he has grown intolerably severe, will not understand the slightest *badinage*, and only the other day said so much to me about my heartlessness that I have not had courage to draw her out ever since."

"That is praiseworthy on his part."

"O, his conduct is altogether very praiseworthy they say, though I suspect at home his patience is not quite so exemplary. But how could any one expect him to endure

her never letting him out of her sight for a moment! Even in society she may generally be seen hanging on his arm, watching his looks, and listening to every word he speaks. The very idea, you know, of such a man as Zorndorff being led about by any woman is preposterous!"

"I hoped to have heard that they lived happily," said Cyrilla, sincerely.

"I am surprised at your caring about the matter," rejoined Madame de Bellegarde; "but as it interests you, I must explain that they never have any vulgar quarrels, or even disagreements—he is much too sublime for anything of that kind. That he tries in every way to induce her to stay at home, is natural; but she is recovering her health rapidly, and will no longer do so. I believe, however, that her strongest motive for going out is, that, when from home, he follows her about like a shadow, and while she imagines him actuated altogether by admiration and affection, *we* all know that he dreads her being enticed into a quiet corner by one of us, and encouraged to make a fool of herself. He is more afraid of my sister Julie than any one, and certainly, by an affectation of credulity, she does contrive to make her say the most extraordinary things!"

"That is not right of Julie," said Cyrilla, with some warmth.

"Ha! ha! ha!—just what Melanie says; but she likes hearing the odd speeches, and writes them in her notebook nevertheless. If it had not been for the Zorndorffs, Exfort would have been intolerably dull last year—their house is beautiful, and exquisitely furnished. I must say Count Zorndorff has the most extraordinary taste for everything of that kind—his establishment is perfect, and they are extremely hospitable."

"And, in return for their hospitality, you laugh at them," said Cyrilla.

"Laugh at him! oh, no. I should like to know who would dare to do that! but *she* is irresistible. In Paris, Berlin, or Vienna she might perhaps have escaped observation; but here she is a star of the first magnitude, a treasure, a never-failing fund of amusement! There she is now,

going towards Melanie. Did you ever see any living being so pale?"

Cyrilla looked, and saw a small and very delicately formed woman, with her hands clasped round one of Zorndorff's arms. Her features were what are generally termed oriental—fine and sharply marked; her eyes, large and black, appeared still more remarkable from the unusually long eyelashes, the dark blue veins below, and thick arched eyebrows above them. A dress of black velvet contrasted well with her neck and shoulders, which were of a death-like opaque white; and the tastefully-arranged flowers in her raven glossy hair were intended judiciously enough to enliven and supply colour to a face so wan that even the lips were of a gray and shadowy hue, scarcely approaching the palest lilac. She spoke for a short time rather languidly to some people near her, then withdrew her arm from Zorndorff's, and, whispering a few words to Melanie, walked with her across the room to Cyrilla, and, sinking into the nearest chair, murmured something about wishing to be acquainted with her, while Melanie went through the usual form with very evident trepidation.

Cyrilla, though in a most trying position, betrayed no embarrassment. Her colour increased, and her heart beat quickly, but she spoke calmly and to the purpose, and the sound of her gentle voice soon re-assured her nervous companion, whose hands jerked oddly, as she apparently played with her pocket-handkerchief. Leaning back in her chair, she listened to Cyrilla's and Madame de Bellegarde's conversation, without making the slightest effort to join in it. The latter discussed all the balls, masquerades, marriages, and other social events that had taken place at Exfort during the last two years, with extraordinary flippancy; but all Cyrilla's endeavours to draw her new acquaintance into the discussion, by an occasional appeal to her for an opinion, only produced at last the observation: "That her health had never allowed her to live in what is called the world until she had come to Exfort; but she believed, if it continued to improve as it had lately done, she should rather enjoy society than otherwise."

“I heard,” said Madame de Bellegarde, bending forward, “that Dr. Hurtig had discovered some new mode of mesmerizing, which you had found unusually beneficial.”

“His mode of treatment is but little changed,” replied the Countess Zorndorff. “If I could persuade Edouard to mesmerize me as he did in former times, I”

“What!” cried Madame de Bellegarde, “is it possible that Count Zorndorff can mesmerize? Do you mean that he makes all those queer movements, and can put people to sleep, and force them to read closed letters, as I once saw a man do at Freilands? Why this is quite delicious—positively he shall mesmerize me to-morrow.”

As she walked towards Zorndorff, an expression of uneasiness passed over the countenance of his wife—she began to murmur, in a low hurried manner: “He told me never to speak to her about it that she only laughed at me he will say I have made *him* a subject of ridicule as well as myself he will tell me that I am wearing out his regard”

Cyrilla’s eyes followed Madame de Bellegarde, and she perceived that Zorndorff listened to her bantering speech with a supercilious smile, and answered it with a few words, which, quietly as they seemed to be spoken, must have been of a peculiarly disagreeable or scoffing description, for she turned from him angrily, saying, that since his marriage he had become a perfect bear.

Cyrilla felt a small light hand touch hers, and looking round, met the fixed gaze of the Countess Zorndorff’s dark eyes. Their expression was so melancholy and anxious that it produced a feeling of discomfort her subsequent conversation was in no way calculated to dispel:—a detailed, yet confused, account of illnesses and suffering,—remedies tried and proposed,—intense longings for health,—her disappointments and renewed hopes,—all poured forth with a slowness of utterance, and languor of attitude, that contrasted too strongly with Cyrilla’s own manner to make it possible she could find herself in any way attracted towards her; yet Zorndorff totally misunderstood her motives as he watched her efforts to leave his wife without

appearing ungracious. She felt none of the jealousy, pain, or anger he supposed, as she turned to listen to Julie de Lindesmar's more voluble and amusing remarks; nor when, in the course of the evening, she ceased to avoid his immediate vicinity, was there the slightest return of her former regard or admiration for him. To the exclusion of all others, one sole idea had taken possession of her mind—it was the thought that she should regain her freedom without endangering her sister's domestic peace, without exposure of her own weak reliance on a man who had abandoned her, without loss of character to him or disgrace to his family. He had said that he could repair his injustice to her without the publicity they had all so much dreaded; and he, of course, understood perfectly how such affairs could be managed! An undefined feeling of satisfaction stole over her; visions of future happiness passed quickly through her mind; and at last hope, such as she had not experienced since the day they had parted at Spa, successfully overcame all her lurking doubts and fears,—but at the same time, unfortunately, so enhanced her charms of person and manner, made her appear to him so like her former self, that his remorse and meditated reparation were alike forgotten, or rather the passion that had apparently slumbered was roused again in all its strength and violence, so that Cyrilla, while rejoicing in the prospect of release from her fetters, was but riveting them more firmly than ever!





CHAPTER XXVIII.

AS Rupert had predicted, Cyrilla could not avoid seeing and hearing of the Zorndorffs every day. Their house was the resort alike of all who were gay, fashionable, and talented, not only in the town, but its neighbourhood, to a considerable distance; and though Zorndorff did not apparently give himself much trouble to amuse his guests, it was universally acknowledged that the arrangements were perfect, and the absence of all restraint or dulness remarkable. Even his wife's occasional nervous attacks, which obliged her to retire to her own room at an early hour, caused no perceptible change; Melanie took her place, and her disappearance often remained long unobserved.

That Cyrilla should be unwilling to enter Zorndorff's house was natural; and for some time she contrived, under various pretexts, to escape doing so; but a few grave words from the President—a few light laughs on the part of the Bellegardes, made her imagine it necessary to overcome her aversion, and induced her to accept the next invitation that she received. Zorndorff, who had imperceptibly managed to avoid speaking to her elsewhere, was then forced to make an exertion. Nothing could, apparently, be more easy and unembarrassed than his manner—nothing more calm than hers. To Melanie, the imperturbable composure of both appeared admirable; and as a proof of the power of education to give self-control, and the force of civilisation to restrain the manifestations of the passions, perhaps it was so.

Cyrilla passed on. Melanie remained near him until he was disengaged—then drew him towards a pyramid of flowers, and while pretending to admire their arrangement, whispered, “You see, Edouard, the effort Cyrilla has made to keep up appearances.”

“She has kept up *her* appearance in the most astonishing manner,” he answered, ironically. “I was prepared, from your account, to see her wasted by fever—bent with care; and I find her more brilliant—more beautiful than ever!”

“Oh, had you but seen her sufferings in Salzburg”

“I prefer seeing her as she is—it relieves my mind from a load of anxiety—tell her so from me.”

There was something in his manner that displeased Melanie; and she observed, with some pique, “I do believe you cannot understand the heroism with which she bears her wrongs!”

“It rather too strongly resembles levity,” said Zorndorff.

“Levity! O how ungenerously men ever judge us! Can you not believe that she trusts in the half-promise you made me before her arrival—trusts you implicitly, after all your treachery? May I assure her that, this time, she will not be deceived by you?”

“If you are determined to mediate between us,” said Zorndorff, “tell her my love is unchanged is stronger than ever.”

“And you only pretended penitence in order to bring her here?” cried Melanie, indignantly. “You will force me to brave Wilhelm’s anger, and compel me to tell him everything that has occurred.”

“I shall not endeavour to dissuade you from doing so,” said Zorndorff, calmly.

“Believe me, Edouard, nothing now deters me but the dread of the disgrace it would bring upon us all, and the total ruin to you.”

“Strong enough motives for silence” began Zorndorff; but, at that moment, Madame de Bellegarde came towards them, and asked, with her habitual smile, what they were discussing so gravely.

“We were talking of disgrace and ruin,” answered Zorndorff.

“Surely,” said Madame de Bellegarde, lowering her voice, and looking quickly round her, “surely you do not believe all the wicked stories propagated here since it has been known that Virginie returns to us? I do assure you she was in no way—even the most remote—the cause of De Rubigny’s death.”

“Of course not,” said Melanie, with some surprise. “I always understood that some quarrel at a gaming-table . . .”

“Precisely,” said Madame de Bellegarde; “but the people here will not be satisfied with a simple statement of facts, that they might have read in the newspapers more than a year ago. It was not Virginie’s fault that De Rubigny could not resist the temptations of the gaming-table, or that he was quarrelsome when he lost at it. Their position made it necessary for her to see people at her house. You know yourself she is very attractive, and—and—as a matter of course, was paid a good deal of attention . . . however, no one would ever have said a word against either of them, if they had been able to pay their debts; but my uncle would do nothing for them until it was too late, and now he proposes to pay all excepting the debts incurred by Virginie, and says that she must satisfy her creditors by instalments from her jointure. Did you ever hear of anything so unreasonable? Why, three years’ income would not pay her milliner! Mamma is now with grandpapa trying to soften his hard heart, and induce him to be liberal.”

“I don’t think she will succeed,” said Zorndorff, quietly; “he would rather give the money to your brother Victor.”

Madame de Bellegarde shrugged her shoulders, and raised her eyebrows, in the manner that only Frenchwomen can accomplish, without making a grimace.

Zorndorff bent towards her and whispered, “Tell your sister to apply to Adlerkron—it will not be the first time he has helped her out of embarrassments of that kind.”

“Who told you that?”

“O, I only referred to her juvenile indiscretions at the florists and confectioners. Do you remember how we enjoyed his tutor’s face of amazement and dismay when, the

very evening of the day he received his pocket-money, not a kreutzer of it was left, and he altogether declined explanations?"

"Rupert was always a dear, generous creature," said Madame de Bellegarde, laughing; "but we were children then, you know . . . that sort of thing would never do now!"

"Better now than then," rejoined Zorndorff, jestingly, "for he has no longer either uncle or tutor to ask impertinent questions."

"How can you talk such nonsense!" said Madame de Bellegarde, walking away; but Zorndorff saw that his words had made more impression than she chose Melanie to observe, and he followed her, glad of an opportunity to leave his aunt, who paid no sort of attention to the few words she still might have heard concerning "friendship from earliest childhood, intimacy greater than often exists between the nearest relations."

She stood in the deepest reverie, until Cyrilla touched her arm, and whispered, "What did he say? When can he speak to me? Will he give me the papers?"

"I had not time to ask him—we were interrupted."

"One would really think he employed people for the purpose," said Cyrilla, impatiently. "Can we not insist on his seeing us some day alone? This state of suspense is becoming perfectly intolerable to me."

A servant at this moment approached them to say that the Countess Zorndorff had become suddenly ill, requested her aunt to take her place, and hoped that Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron would have the kindness to visit her in her room as soon as she was disengaged.

"What ought I to do, Melanie?"

"Go to her by all means; it would be cruel to refuse . . . Poor thing, she is totally unconscious of the injury she has done you, and is even more to be pitied than you are."

In an apartment dimly lighted by a shaded lamp, Cyrilla found the Countess Zorndorff reclining on a sofa, and supported by cushions covered with crimson velvet. The rich

colouring of the furniture around her seemed to increase the ghastliness of her appearance, and render more appalling the convulsions that still continued occasionally to distort her features, but of which she seemed quite unconscious. As soon as she perceived Cyrilla, she requested her to come close to her, and began to regret being ill the first evening she had been induced to spend with her.

Cyrilla begged she would not speak or think of it, and hoped she had not suffered much.

"I don't exactly know Have I been long ill, Vica?" she said, turning to a tall gaunt woman, who stood beside her.

"Only a few minutes quite a short faintness."

"Not so very short either," she rejoined, thoughtfully, "or you would not have had time to change my dress, and O my head I feel as if my brain were turned to stone.—Will you put your hand upon my forehead," she added, looking towards Cyrilla; "it will do you no harm, and may do me much good."

Cyrilla did as she was requested, and as the Countess took the other disengaged hand in both hers, a remarkable tranquillity overspread her features, and she leaned back murmuring, as if in explanation, "My existence almost depends on the emanations from the nerves of others emanations which to them are no loss but to me great gain."

With the selfishness so common in cases of nervous debility, she then half-slumbered, thoughtless of the wearying position which she had imposed on Cyrilla, whose slightest effort to move, or release her hand, instantly produced moans so expressive of uneasiness, that even the thought was at last abandoned. As she stood there, the cold night air from an open window raising the light folds of her ball-dress, and waving her long bright ringlets from her face and shoulders, Zorndorff rushed into the room: "Why did you not send for me or Dr. Hurtig?" he said in a low eager voice to the person called Vica, and then, without waiting for an answer, advanced towards Cyrilla, and while he hastily whispered some words of

excuse, she felt his hands gliding along her arms, and then resting over hers, as if to detain her. Unconscious of his motives, she drew back suddenly, and his wife started up, exclaiming, "Don't leave me—pray, don't leave me," stretched out her arms towards her, and grasped her hands so tightly, that it appeared impossible to liberate them.

Cyrilla had not courage to struggle, and the Countess, after shivering violently for a few moments, sank back again, perfectly motionless on her pillows. Gradually her figure became so death-like, that Cyrilla turned away her head, and then Zorndorff said quietly, "Why did you not let me put myself *en rapport* with her? I wanted to release you."

"I did not understand"

Again he touched her arms, then his wife's forehead and hands, and immediately the grasp relaxed; but when Cyrilla endeavoured to move away, with the intention of leaving the room, the Countess slowly rose, and it appeared almost as if she were imitating Cyrilla's stealthy motions, while she followed her in the unsteady manner of a person recovering from faintness. The long black hair, hanging in disordered masses over her white dressing-gown the half-closed eyes and ghastly hue of her rigid features, combined so exactly to form what Cyrilla imagined a personification of somnambulism, that curiosity overcame the awe inspired by her almost spectral appearance, and she stopped and awaited her approach.

"I will not touch you if you dislike it so much," she said, with a deprecativè gesture, probably observing that Cyrilla shrank from her contact; "could you but overcome your dislike to me you might be the means of restoring me to health."

"I have no dislike to you" began Cyrilla.

"Something nearly allied to it, then you retire whenever I come near you evade my society on all occasions, and until this evening have refused all my entreaties to enter this house!"

"A scene of this kind, Margaret, will scarcely make Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron disposed to come again," ob-

served Zorndorff, rolling a chair towards his wife as if he feared her falling.

"I am sorry I happened to be ill just *this* evening," she said, sitting down, and catching Cyrilla's dress to detain her,—“very sorry . . . I have so longed to speak to you alone . . . promise me that you will come here to-morrow without Melanie . . . or any one who can be a restraint on us !”

Cyrilla hesitated.

Zorndorff desired Vica to leave them, and send an express for Dr. Hurtig.

"Edouard will not allow me to go to you as often as I wish," she continued ; "he thinks I might alarm you if I were ill, or . . . or . . . infect you with my nervousness . . . but I am sure he is mistaken. You are young, healthy, and happy . . . your touch, your very presence, is a renewal of life to me, and seldom as we have been together, I am already quite convinced you wish me well, and that of all—yes, *all* the people here, you alone are capable of making a sacrifice to restore me to health !”

"You are ungrateful, Margaret," said Zorndorff, half turning from the open window out of which he had been gazing ; "our aunt Melanie feels more interest about you than you can possibly expect—any one else to do."

"I am ready to acknowledge that she has been kind and attentive, especially latterly ; but her interest has been confined to the mode of treatment adopted by Dr. Hurtig—she comes to see me mesmerized—notes all my sleepwaking observations—talks of them afterwards more than is necessary—but—but—she loves me not. She thinks I cumber the earth. I overheard her saying to Dr. Hurtig this very morning, when she supposed me sleeping, that it would be a blessing if I were taken from this world, for she feared . . ." here the Countess opened her eyes with a look of terror, "feared that . . . our child . . . would be an epileptic object . . . an *idiot* !”

Zorndorff shaded his eyes with his hand and turned away.

"The idea has never left my mind since," she continued,

rising, and with a violent effort walking towards him ; “never can I forget it, for it has deprived me of all hope, all happiness . . . O Edouard, I am unutterably wretched !”

Cyrilla scarcely heard the last words ; the moment the unhappy woman’s hand had been withdrawn from her dress she had passed into the adjoining room ; it was an ante-chamber, in which large folding doors were panelled with most confusing looking glass, and draped with curtains like the windows. The first she opened conducted into a gorgeously furnished bedroom ; the second showed her a small winding staircase, and, at the same moment, a third opened, and admitted the physician, followed by Vica. Not wishing at that moment to see Zorndorff again, and desirous of a few minutes’ time to prepare herself for music and gaiety, after the painful scene she had witnessed, she descended the stairs, concluding that at their termination she should find herself in the servants’ apartments. Such was not the case ; they brought her into a lofty and spacious room, which, as well as the faint light from a small silver lamp burning on a writing-table would allow her to discern, seemed to be half drawing-room, half library. Several beautifully carved bookcases reached to the ceiling ; marble tables, with vases and statuettes ; monstrous globes and luxurious chairs ; tables, with maps, new books, and engravings, were judiciously arranged in orderly disorder. The glass doors of an adjoining conservatory were open, admitting a flood of fragrance, with the refreshing sound of a splashing fountain ; and one of the three large French windows, partly open, permitted a view of a dark night and the starry firmament.

That the apartment was much used was evident. Beside the fireplace, with its two well-heated porcelain stoves in the form of pillars, there was the open work-table of the Countess—a book, handkerchief, and gloves, that looked as if the owner had but just left the room ; and of her and all that had occurred within the last short hour, of Zorndorff, the possessor of the affluence he had so eagerly coveted, Cyrilla now began to think, altogether forgetful of time or place. While still speculating on what his future conduct

towards herself would be, and how long he would continue to avoid her, she heard a step on the stairs, and saw him enter the room by the door she had left open. Unconscious of her presence, he walked to the open window, folded his arms, and looked upwards with a sigh so long and deep, that it almost resembled a groan. Much as Cyrilla had desired an opportunity of speaking to him, increased, perhaps, by the evident wish on his part to defer an explanation, well as she had imagined herself prepared with speech and answer, now that the moment of trial had arrived, the words of reproach, expostulation, and entreaty, so carefully prepared, could find no utterance. Ashamed of her pusillanimity, and knowing how much she should regret it afterwards, she compelled herself to approach him, not with the steady step and condemnatory mein that a woman so innocent and oppressed might have assumed, but with all her natural gentleness, and an overpowering feeling of timidity. The silence in the room was so profound, that even the slight rustling of her dress instantly attracted his attention; he looked round, and, taken completely by surprise, for a moment lost all command of himself. It was in vain he turned away and endeavoured to conceal his emotion; it was scarcely inferior to her own, as she faltered a few words of entreaty, that he would be just and generous, and procure her a release from her vows, now that he could do so without compromising himself or Melanie.

“And if I cannot . . .” began Zorndorff.

“You can, you can . . . Melanie has told me what you said.”

“I will no longer endure her interference, Cyrilla; she interprets my words according to her wishes; extracts promises from them which were never intended, and, though with the best intentions possible, continually misrepresents us to each other!”

“O no . . . I hope not,” cried Cyrilla, eagerly; “for she told me you repented your injustice to me, and would endeavour to repair it.”

“She told *me*,” rejoined Zorndorff, evasively, “that

while I imagined I was saving Margaret's life, I was sacrificing yours; that between fever and sorrow your youth and beauty were wasting away; and," he added, with a forced laugh, "and I believed her, and would have thought no risk too great to save you! Cyrilla . . . you have returned to Exfort just in time to prevent me from making a fool of myself—just in time to save me from throwing away my last chance of happiness. I have no longer any fears for your health, nor . . . for your happiness either, as long as you continue to be the object of universal admiration, and the idol of your cousin Rupert!"

"Most ungenerous," exclaimed Cyrilla, indignantly; "and from you, too, who . . . who understand so well the necessity of keeping up appearances before the world."

"I flatter myself that I too keep up appearances; but no one can for a moment imagine *me* happy! I have not even arrived at an affectation of indifference. It is under the mask of a cold stateliness foreign to my nature, that I am obliged to hide the violence of my feelings, and endeavour to suppress the outbursts of passion, daily provoked by seeing you bestow looks of confidence and smiles of affection on another which are mine by right."

"Reproaches from *you* . . . after conduct such as yours?" cried Cyrilla, almost breathless from amazement. "This is too much!"

Zorndorff pretended not to hear, and continued: "The manner in which you now receive Adlerkron's attentions is too remarkable to be passed over in silence or endured patiently, and I cannot help . . ."

"Excuse me, Count Zorndorff," said Cyrilla, interrupting him; "but you must allow me to remind you of your last letter to me, in which you acknowledge having forfeited all right to control my actions in future."

"True . . . true . . . I have no right to be jealous—I mean to say, no right to complain . . ."

"You have none," said Cyrilla; "and I renounce my most indisputable right to both, on condition that you free me from bonds that are a restraint even on my thoughts, and have become intolerable to me!" She paused for a

moment, and then continued, in a low melancholy voice : " I have suffered much since we parted at Spa—more, much more, than you seem inclined to believe, Count Zorndorff. Your letter caused me such agony, that my mother . . . died in the effort to console me . . . Of my own long illness I will not speak ; until very lately I have had little reason to rejoice in my recovery from it, so joyless, so hopeless has since been my life." Perceiving that her words had made some impression, she added, beseechingly : " O, Edouard, be merciful . . . do not ill use the power you have over me . . . put an end to your present criminal course of life, and even in this world you will be rewarded. Your wife will recover her health, and you will be able to enjoy, without remorse, the wealth you so much desired to possess."

" Have you not seen enough this evening, Cyrilla, to convince you that it has been too dearly bought ? The idea of enjoyment without you is beyond the stretch of my imagination now ; let me rather hope," he added, in the subdued fervent manner of former times ; " let me rather hope that your affection has stood the (I confess unpardonably severe) test to which I ventured to put it."

" I am no Griselda," said Cyrilla, in a scarcely audible voice.

" You are angry, jealous, and wish to punish me. I have suffered enough already, if you knew but all."

" I do not wish you to suffer, quite the contrary ; but I expect you to save me from a continuation of my present state of bondage. Can you imagine any situation more painful for a woman than mine ? and, under the circumstances, is it not unheard of cruelty your desiring a continuation of—of the tie that still binds us ?"

" And yet—I do desire it—you are mine, Cyrilla—mine—and I never will resign you—if I can help it."

" Then you will drive me to extremities," she cried, tears starting to her eyes at the disappointment of all her hopes. " You force me to demand the certificates, papers ; in short, whatever is necessary to enable me to procure legal redress, and save me from such unexampled tyranny."

“You shall have them—and my advice also, if you wish it.”

“*Your* advice!”

“Yes; and assistance too. Nothing can now be more desirable, more gratifying to me, than being compelled by you to resume rights which will so fully compensate for all that I may lose. Consideration for Margaret can have no weight with you—why should it? Assert your just claims, and believe that, let what will ensue—you are dearer to me than all this world can offer; and I am ready to brave disgrace, imprisonment, death itself, rather than resign you.”

“Send Melanie to me,” said Cyrilla faintly, as she turned away from him; “I wish to go home.”

Zorndorff instantly left the room.





CHAPTER XXIX.



MOST unfortunate affair altogether," said Melanie the next day, after she and Cyrilla had talked over the events of the preceding evening; "most unfortunate, and threatening, as you say, prolonged anxiety and unhappiness to us both; but you must allow that, like everything in which Edouard is concerned, it has its interesting side too—there is something inexpressibly romantic in your present position."

"Oh, Melanie, spare me all such remarks in future; I have none of the qualities necessary for a heroine, and completely oversee the romance, while feeling so keenly the wretchedness of my situation."

"But surely, Cyrilla, it must have been gratifying to you to find Edouard's love unchanged, to hear him say that he would resign everything, would dare anything for you!"

"On the contrary, Melanie, I felt as if guilty of an impropriety when listening to him."

"Impropriety!"

"Such it appeared to me, when I remembered that he was the openly acknowledged husband of another woman; and how could I forget it, after all I had seen and heard but one short half-hour before?"

"But you seem quite to forget that he is your husband and not hers."

"I wish I could—or rather, I wish it were not so. The more I think on this distressing subject, and it is now never out of my thoughts, the more convinced I am that

there is but one person who could put an end to our difficulties."

"You mean Wilhelm?"

"Yes; I feel certain the President would at once tell us how we should act. Regard for Edouard—for his own family, would ensure his secrecy, and if a divorce be obtainable without publicity, he could manage it."

"I will no longer endeavour to dissuade you," said Melanie, with a sigh of resignation; "my confidence in Edouard was the means of bringing you into this strait, your confidence in Wilhelm will place me in a still greater: but I shall consider it a sort of retribution; and as I cannot summon courage to await the explosion of his wrath, you must at least defer your communication until I have made arrangements for retiring to some quiet place, where together we can hide our sorrows from the world, and hope for the changes that time may bring us."

"No, Melanie, no—if you are convinced that the President would be so very unreasonably angry with you, I must endeavour never even to think of consulting him again."

"Heaven knows I meant well," said Melanie, earnestly. "I thought I was securing you a life of happiness that falls to the lot of few—and even now, disappointed and deceived as we have been by Edouard, I cannot help admiring and thinking him superior to all other men. He seems born to command, fitted in every way to adorn a high station; and then his conduct to his wife is absolutely sublime!"

"To which of them?" asked Cyrilla, bitterly, while large tears gathered in her eyes.

Melanie, somewhat staggered in her romantic speech by this question, paused before she answered, "I meant that wretched, unhealthy woman, whose death would be a blessing to herself and all connected with her."

"God alone knows whether or not her death be desirable," said Cyrilla; "for my part, I wish her health, long life, and every happiness this world can bestow."

"How angelic!" exclaimed Melanie.

“O no, no,” cried Cyrilla, hastily, “you must not misunderstand me; my wish is selfish, for her happiness is henceforward inseparable from mine. Can you not perceive that though no sense of crime, no commiseration for me, no entreaties or threats, have hitherto been able to induce Edouard to release me, her restoration to health must at last convince him of the necessity of doing so? I believe, dear Melanie, I ought to tell you that—in that case—I—I—have promised Rupert . . .” she stopped, embarrassed.

“What?” said Melanie, looking suddenly towards Cyrilla, whose intense blush made her half-uttered sentence almost instantly intelligible to her; “Oh, I understand it all now,” she continued slowly, “affection no longer pleads for Edouard—you have ceased to care for him.”

“Long, long ago!” answered Cyrilla.

“Can such things be?” exclaimed Melanie, clasping her hands and looking upwards. “O, why was not my fate yours, and yours mine, Cyrilla!” she added, shaking her head half sorrowfully, half reproachfully. “You have never loved.”

“It seems to me,” said Cyrilla, “that every one have their own individual and peculiar idea of the meaning of the word love—yours is beyond my comprehension.”

“And yet I thought you understood it so well!”

“I am afraid,” said Cyrilla, blushing still more deeply than before, the colour darting up to her temples, and spreading over her neck,—“I am afraid I must confess that admiration for Edouard’s singularly beautiful face and graceful figure made me give him credit for all the good qualities you said he possessed.”

“I said but the truth: better judges than I am have declared his intellect to be of the first order. He has erred—sinned, if you will—but oh, Cyrilla, he loves you still.”

“I believe he does,” she answered, with a look of unequivocal contempt; “that is, according to his egotistical ideas, which make him altogether regardless of the pain he inflicts. He seems to think the word love an excuse for every description of tyranny, and uses it to justify his pro-

longing my bondage, and marring all my prospects of happiness! In three months from the time I left Salzburg, Rupert will require a partial explanation; in six months I must give him up for ever, or tell him all."

"A duel will be the inevitable consequence," said Melanie.

"Rupert is no duellist. He disapproves of the custom from religious motives."

"Of that I have no doubt; but you place too much reliance on his principles if you think him capable of refusing a challenge, when sent to him after an angry dispute with Edouard, who has no scruples, and would have no fear but that of losing you."

"He *has* lost me," cried Cyrilla, vehemently, "lost me for ever! Were his unfortunate wife, on whose death he has speculated so openly, even now in her grave, nothing would induce me to live with him!"

"There is something which would compel you, I fear."

"What?"

"The marriage laws."

"Oh, Melanie, do not say so . . . are you sure, quite sure, of this?"

"I have reason to be so," answered Melanie, "for I learned it practically. A very few days after my marriage—in fact, the first opportunity that offered—I . . . fled from Wilhelm . . . returned to my father, threw myself at his feet, and entreated of him to take me back again. I told him I was *désenchanté* of marriage, wretched, desperate, and made the wildest vows never to displease him or my stepmother again; but it was in vain I wept and implored. Though tears of commiseration stood in his eyes, he assured me that he could not do as I desired—that no repining or repugnance on my part would be of any avail—that I henceforward belonged to my husband, and must return to him if he claimed me. Wilhelm, informed of my place of refuge by a letter which I had left on my toilet, came for me himself, and without vouchsafing any expostulations, or demanding any explanations, placed my arm within his, and led me to the carriage. I did not for some

time observe that we had post-horses—did not know that we were leaving my father's neighbourhood altogether when I discovered but this can scarcely interest you now”

“It does deeply The President was, of course, very angry?”

“Not at all he tried to look grave, but I saw that he had a strong inclination to laugh. I had acted like a child, and as such he treated me for some time after. I only mention this to prove to you that if Edouard”

“I understand,” said Cyrilla; “but I have the letter in which he promises not to claim any right to control me.”

“Then perhaps he will not; but let me again advise you not to irritate him.”

“You are right,” said Cyrilla, musingly; “and as he is jealous of Rupert, I must avoid in future annoying him in that way at least. Besides, I threatened when it would have been wiser to have entreated.”

“That was a great mistake,” said Melanie. “A woman's force lies altogether in entreaty, for the laws have assigned us a so very subordinate social position, that in most cases our threats resemble the ravings of angry children.”

“Circumstances have unfortunately made mine of but little more importance,” answered Cyrilla; “and I suppose it will now be better for me to wait patiently a few weeks longer, and then, under the plea of demanding those odious papers, and asking his advice, I can once more see him alone, and make a final effort to discover a spark of humanity under the hard crust of pride and selfishness that I formerly supposed to be dignity and firmness of character.”

At this moment Madame de Bellegarde and her sister were announced, and a scene of light kisses and fugitive embraces, intermixed with careless inquiries about health and sleep, ensued. Madame de Bellegarde whispered to Cyrilla: “I suppose, dear, the Zorndorff frightened you last night, you went home so very early. Now, take my advice, and don't let her fasten upon you in her vampire way, to inhale your imponderable emanations, as Melanie says no one can stand that but the mass of sinew

and bone called Vica. I hope, Melanie, you will not humour your niece in this fancy that she has taken for Cyrilla. I perceived the whim the very first time they met, but had no idea it would last so long."

Melanie was listening to Julie de Lindesmar's account of the arrival of her brother, which had taken place while they had been at the Zorndorffs the evening before. "You will be delighted with Victor," she continued; "he is so animated, so thoroughly French—quite new to us too, for you know he was ten years with mamma's father at Amboise, and for the last five or six has been studying *cameralia*, I think he calls it. I suppose you know what that means—I don't."

"It is the finance department. Edouard studied *cameralia*, and is Kammer assessor."

"Exactly; and Victor has got a letter of introduction to him and to the President."

"That was scarcely necessary," observed Melanie, smiling.

"O, it is a letter of particular recommendation to the President, as he wishes to be appointed to some situation here, where he has so many relations, and will soon have so many friends; and I have been so anxious to arrange a little pic-nic to Freilands that he may be introduced to you all at once! The weather is so fine that we could arrange everything à l'Anglaise, and . . ."

"That is," cried Madame de Bellegarde, "she wants to dine on the grass somewhere in the park, and have ear-wigs and ants crawling over the table-cloth. I think it would be better to ask Rupert to invite us to dine with him. We should then have a good dinner, good wine, and ices, which would put Bellegarde and everybody into good humour, and save our servants a lot of trouble!"

"But," persisted Julie, "we want to be quite *en petit comité*, and Rupert cannot be made to understand that sort of thing. He will invite at least half-a-dozen of the officers of his regiment; and of what use are they excepting when people intend to dance?"

"Well, perhaps we may want them exactly for that

purpose. You know Victor intends to teach us a new Polish dance."

"Another reason, Adrienne, for wishing to be *entre nous*. I don't mind having M. de Klemmhein—he quite belongs to us, and happens to be a friend of Victor's; but Captain Stauffen and Major Arnheim are my aversion. Now, this dance I am quite determined to keep for ourselves; and only imagine, Cyrilla, how nice! We must have little bells fastened on the heels of our shoes, and all the men must wear spurs! The very idea of an exclusive dance is so exquisite that you may imagine what a treasure Victor will prove to us!"

"Well, but about our pic-nic," said Madame de Bellegarde, impatiently; "as Julie will not allow me to apply to Rupert, I think, to prevent confusion, it will be better for me to manage the whole affair; but Melanie must invite my father-in-law, and half-a-dozen other elderly bores, to dine with the President,—they are better out of the way, you know."

"But," cried Julie, "what can we do with their wives, who, dull at all times, are doubly dull when obliged to speak French? We only want their sons, and . . . a few of their daughters."

"Stay," cried Madame de Bellegarde, "a sudden and most charming idea has just occurred to me—Let us all dine quietly at home, as if we were thinking of nothing at all, but directly after propose driving out, just at the time when stupid people feel drowsy,—nothing pleasanter than an evening drive, terminated by a gay supper. Rupert can take charge of Julie and Cyrilla; with him they require no chaperon—Melanie must have places in her *char-à-banc* for those we choose to invite, and no others—I shall do the same. There will be music and moonlight, and whether we return before or after midnight is of very little importance."

"The plan is feasible," said Melanie, "the weather beautiful, and Rupert will be enchanted. He has been endeavouring to persuade us to go to Freilands the last week, but Wilhelm expects a return of the cold weather, and will not yet believe in spring."

“And now,” said Madame de Bellegarde, “I must go to the Zorndorffs to let them know our change of plan.”

“Was Margaret well enough to have consented to join you?”

“She is quite well again—that is, as well as she ever acknowledges herself to be. Count Zorndorff seemed to wish her to remain at home; but as he accepted the invitation for himself, she did not hesitate a moment, and only requested we would excuse her not remaining out of doors during the sunset, as the last rays of light produced a degree of torpor and chill that she found it impossible to overcome.”

“Poor thing!” said Melanie. “I wish I could ascertain exactly how much is real, how much the effect of imagination, in all this. Yesterday morning, after she had been mesmerized as usual, and when I supposed her in a state of sleepwaking, I made a remark to Dr. Hurtig which Cyrilla tells me she overheard; now, as I was not ‘en rapport’ with her, she ought not to have heard me at all; so it is evident that more ‘passes’ are necessary than he generally uses.”

“O, Melanie, could you not persuade her to allow herself to be mesmerized at Freilands this evening?”

“Perhaps I could, but Edouard would not consent,—he says he will not have her tormented.”

“But I thought somnambulists quite enjoyed being pinched and pulled, and having people standing on their legs, and twisting their arms!”

“It is supposed they do not suffer from any of the experiments tried on them, as they always feel quite refreshed on waking; but with Margaret, you see—mesmerism—is a sort of last remedy—the only chance left of curing her of a disease which dates its commencement from earliest infancy.”

“Good gracious! I thought her complaint was merely what is called ‘nerves,’ though I have often suspected there was something the matter with her brain too, she is occasionally so very queer, and says such odd things.”

“I am sure I should not be surprised if it were so,” said

Melanie with a sigh; "a constant repetition of attacks, such as she is subject to, must in the end have a fatal influence on the mind, and—" here she stopped suddenly; Zorndorff was standing at the door of his uncle's study, and looking at her reproachfully. It was the first time he had appeared there since his marriage, and his former habit of using the communication between the rooms had been forgotten. Cyrilla looked up for a moment, and then continued to work with as unconcerned an air as she could assume; and while she pondered on the different motives which might have induced him to change his plan of avoidance, and enter a room where it was so probable he would have found her with Melanie alone, Julie advanced towards him exclaiming: "How often it happens that when one speaks or thinks of people they suddenly appear!"

"I thought you were talking of Margaret," said Zorndorff.

"Adrienne and Melanie I daresay were, but I have been telling Cyrilla what an attentive devoted husband you are!"

"Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron would most probably have preferred some other subject of conversation."

"Perhaps so," said Julie, looking from one to the other with more meaning than was agreeable to either; "her attention seemed rather divided between what I was saying and what she overheard about mesmerism,—a subject new to her, but one of which I have heard so much during the last year, that I detest the word and all connected with it,—besides, you know I am a non-believer."

"Indeed! To what extent?"

"O,—a—you see I think those foolish movements with the hands called 'passes' really too ridiculous; and then the idea that people can walk about and talk, and know nothing of it afterwards, is so very absurd."

"Some people walk and many people talk in their ordinary sleep, and are unconscious of it afterwards," said Zorndorff, quietly.

"Yes; but these mesmerized people do and say such odd

yet commonplace things, that one cannot help suspecting imposture,—for my part, I must have more proofs. At present, the whole thing is so completely beyond my comprehension, that I cannot and will not believe in it.”

“So,” said Melanie, advancing towards them, “so, whatever is beyond your comprehension is unworthy of belief, or a delusion. I should really like to know what you and Adrienne do believe.”

“Anything you please excepting somnambulism.”

“You believe in your own existence, perhaps?”

“Most certainly; I should be a fool to doubt it,—but then, I *know* myself.”

“Indeed! physically and psychologically?”

“I don’t quite understand either of those words,” said Julie, laughing, “but I can *feel* myself, and therefore I know that I am.”

“A most feminine argument,” observed the President, who had stopped at the door to listen; “Cartesius was less disposed to materialism when he began his philosophy with the celebrated words ‘Cogito, ergo sum.’”

“O, I know nothing about either Latin or philosophy,” cried Julie, “and the question Melanie asked is much too difficult for me. Choose something common and more easily understood.”

“And what is easily understood? What do we in fact understand?” said Melanie thoughtfully. “Let us take the commonest insect, a blade of grass, a grain of wheat. What is the sum of our knowledge?”

“Take the grain of wheat and try,” said Julie.

“Be it so. You place it in the ground and it grows, and becomes an ear.”

“Yes.”

“A grain of wheat was found in the encasements of a mummy in Egypt, supposed to have been there two thousand years; it was sent to England, sown, and it grew. Can you believe that?”

“It is surprising, but I can believe it.”

“Yet you do not know why it grew.”

“I suppose the germ was uninjured.”

“And what is the germ?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Julie, impatiently.

“Nor I either,” said Melanie; “but, like you, I believe that the grain of wheat did grow, and that other grains will grow. I see myself surrounded by things which I am compelled to believe, without understanding why such things are so; and I have therefore no difficulty in placing mesmeric somnambulism among the rest.”

“Perhaps if you would take the trouble to make a convert of me,” began Julie, “if you would clearly explain to me what somnambulism really is”

“Impossible,” said Melanie; “have I not confessed that it is one of the millions of things beyond my comprehension; but that does not prevent me from believing that it may be a peculiar condition of man, and that there may be imponderous and invisible emanations from our bodies, that later discoveries may make useful to our fellow-creatures; but, at all events, mesmeric phenomena can never cease to interest me, as they tend to prove that we may enjoy the exercise of all our faculties, yet retain no recollection of having done so—and the continuity of thought once satisfactorily established, all doubts and difficulties concerning sleep and dreams are at an end!”

“What doubts and difficulties do you mean? I know nothing about them—I like sleeping, and I detest dreaming, and I believe most people think as I do.”

“Edouard,” said the President, walking into his study, “with respect to the revenues of the crown lands, Sennheim and Streck, as I was observing”

“You will find the report on your table,” answered Zorndorff, to whom Madame de Bellegarde turned as she was about to leave the room, and observed:—

“I am going to your house now, to tell Margaret that our pic-nic dinner is to be changed into a supper, and so late, that she will have little to fear from the beams of the setting sun.”

“Melanie,” said Zorndorff, approaching his aunt as the door closed on Madame de Bellegarde, “you were about to betray the secret of my domestic wretchedness to that

thoughtless woman just as I entered the room. How can you forget that curiosity, not interest for Margaret, prompts all her questions?"

Melanie threw herself into a chair with a look of annoyance; she had given him an opportunity of not unreasonably upbraiding her, precisely at the moment she was preparing to overwhelm him with well-merited reproaches for his tyranny to Cyrilla. She did not speak, and he pursued the subject no further, but coming close to her, said almost in a whisper, "Margaret was very ill and restless last night; one could almost fancy that the threatening danger caused her an uneasiness similar to that said to be produced by a drawn dagger held over a sleeper."

"What danger?"

"Has not Cyrilla told you that she intends to acknowledge our marriage? Will not the discovery of a claim, which I shall not for a moment think of disputing, put a sudden end to Margaret's life?"

"You wilfully misunderstand Cyrilla," cried Melanie, quickly; "Margaret's life is in no danger whatever, if you will, in this instance at least, act honourably, as you said you could and would do."

"Cyrilla was not here—I overrated my strength when I so spoke—the sacrifice is beyond my power, Melanie—no sense of guilt can enable me to resign her, no feeling of honour stifle a love like mine."

"Love!" exclaimed Melanie, indignantly; "do not profane the word by so using it, or flatter yourself that under such constraint Cyrilla will preserve a particle of regard for you. In your rough grasp love dies, and ambition and selfishness stride over the mangled remains!"

A smile of derision seemed to hover over Zorndorff's lips as the President called out, "What are you talking about there? has any one been murdered?"

"Only metaphorically," answered Zorndorff.

Cyrilla, perceiving that he was about to leave them, looked up anxiously; her face was very pale, and her lips trembled as she faltered, "So then I have nothing more to hope from you."

“Everything,” he replied, “if you will speak to me yourself in future, and cease these messages, which only lead to disagreeable misunderstandings. It is well known that interference between people connected as we are, is always a thankless office. Forgive me, Melanie, but henceforward Cyrilla must confer with me alone, and—less angrily, I hope.”

“Edouard,” cried the President, a little impatiently, “if you will come here for a moment, I think we may put the Sennheim and Streck papers aside until the middle of August.”

Zorndorff, probably rejoicing in the interruption, immediately joined his uncle, and was soon altogether immersed in business.

After a pause of some minutes, Cyrilla approached her sister and whispered, “Melanie, do you think he *could* if he *would*?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And among your extensive acquaintance is there no one to whom you could apply for advice?”

Melanie shook her head.

“Not *one* you could trust with our secret?”

“Not one. I am afraid, dearest, that you must let the matter rest for the present, and resign yourself to what is inevitable.”

“That is hard, very hard—*now*,” murmured Cyrilla.

“The trial is severe,” said Melanie, “but it is of no vulgar or common-place description. Situated as you are, I could have felt a sort of excitement in anxieties so calculated to engross the imagination, and render even the common occurrences of life dramatically interesting! But then how differently I should have acted,” she continued, with great self-complacency; “no thought of marriage with another would ever have entered my mind—conscious of my power over Edouard, I should have overwhelmed him with my magnanimity; no reproach should have passed my lips; great in my strength of mind, I should have sought and consoled his frail suffering wife, should have talked and reasoned with him as I had ever done; with all the calm

dignity of friendship, I should have shown him that the woman whose confidence he had betrayed was worthy of a better fate! Seldom, and in but fleeting moments, should he have been allowed to see the grief that was gnawing at my heart—like the Spartan boy, I should have hugged . . .”

“Dear Melanie,” cried Cyrilla, half laughing though her eyes were full of tears, “it is quite evident that your magnanimity exceeds mine, but I scarcely expected to hear you speak in this way again, after seeing you so evidently angry with him as you were but a short time ago.”

“Your anxious face and his haughty composure irritated me, I believe, but it was for the last time; he has unreservedly declined my interference, and my office of mediatrix is now at an end.”

“Then,” said Cyrilla, “I have no friend left but Rupert, and fears for his safety must ever prevent my asking his assistance. Nothing remains for me to do but, when once assured of the fallacy of my last hope, to give him up for ever, and endeavour, as you say, to resign myself to what is inevitable.”

“And,” said Melanie, “in the meantime try as much as possible to keep up your spirits and be like yourself. Adrienne and Julie have observed that you are not so gay as you used to be, and asked if you had not been greatly disappointed at Edonard’s marriage. You must make an exertion to prevent them from pitying you. I wish Rupert would call here, that we might tell him to come for you and Julie this evening. I’m sure I do not know where he is to be found just now.”

“At Freilands, most probably,” suggested Cyrilla; “he said something about expecting people to dine with him there.”

“Why did you not say so when Adrienne was here? That alone would have been sufficient to make her postpone her supper.”

“Quite unnecessary,” said Cyrilla. “You have only to let Rupert know we want him, and he will manage to break up his party early enough to come here; if not, he can send for us, which will do just as well.”

“I don't like to ask Wilhelm for *his* horses,” said Melanie, walking towards her writing table; “he would require a long explanation; and as to proposing his joining us, that is out of the question, as Adrienne says he is such a restraint upon me that she will not have him. It is a great mistake men making themselves feared by their own family; what they gain in respect they lose in affection! I shall be obliged to tell him that we intend to drive out and spend the evening with the Bellegardes.”

“Do you not think,” said Cyrilla, “that by one great effort of courage you could shake off your fear, and be perfectly candid with the President in future? In your place I should at least make the trial. Why not say that you are going to Freilands with Adrienne? Is it worth prevaricating for such a trifle?”

“Perhaps not; but it is also not worth quarrelling about.”

“You fear he would object?”

“Not exactly—but he would say something—a—I don't exactly know what—something calculated to lessen or destroy our pleasure.”

“I think you are mistaken; and as no better opportunity is likely to occur to make the trial I have so often urged, suppose you tell him our plans after dinner to-day; it will be better than that some chance reference should betray all a few days hence, as has so often happened, giving him real cause for anger in the discovery of having been deceived.”

“You do not understand him, Cyrilla. I never consulted him about anything, never asked his opinion, without encountering opposition or sneers. On the contrary, when I have occasionally done things that might have provoked such a man, he seemed to think it a waste of words to talk over what was passed and could not be changed.”

“We shall never think alike on these subjects,” rejoined Cyrilla. “I consider perfect confidence necessary to happiness; and my mother always said . . .”

“I am sorry,” said Melanie, with some bitterness, “very sorry to be obliged so often to enlighten you about your

mother, Cyrilla. She certainly bestowed her confidence, or rather issued her commands, without reserve. My father was more in my position, with this difference, that a '*fait accompli*' did not exempt him from reprimands . . ."

"Which," interposed Cyrilla, "his thoughtlessness not unfrequently deserved."

"Perhaps so. That he was careless in pecuniary matters is true; but his generosity was so unbounded that one could only regret his not having illimitable command of money. Never did my mother wish for anything that he did not procure it—for those he loved nothing could be too costly!"

"My mother's lot was a more common one," said Cyrilla, "her wishes were not expressed, because she knew they could not prudently be gratified."

"That was her rational way of showing her regard," said Melanie, "and was quite characteristic; she gained in consequence his esteem and respect in an extraordinary degree, and that was all she ambited. Perhaps, after all, she was right. Women easily satisfied are not likely to meet with disappointment, and are never so cruelly deceived in their expectations as I have been."

"Then your expectations were unreasonable," cried Cyrilla, warmly; "for I have lately discovered that there are few men who admire and like their wives more than the President does you."

"Admire! like! according to his ideas, perhaps, but not mine."

"I think you are ungrateful, and misunderstand him sometimes," began Cyrilla.

"Ungrateful! Ought I, perhaps, to feel gratitude for his unmerciful criticism of my poems? his never-ceasing ridicule of my endeavours to wreath my brow with laurel, and raise my head above the waters of Lethe?"

"No; but his advice is worth attending to; for instance, when he said yesterday that he thought a journey through the south of Germany could be better described in prose than verse, you were unreasonably offended."

"Because he only said so to mortify me. Had I in-

tended to describe Berlin, Koenigsburg, Erfurt, or Exfort, he might have been right; but can any subject be more adapted to every description of poetry than the south, with its mountains and lakes, legends of gnomes, dwarfs and spirits, alpine horns and wild huntsmen?"

"It was the description of your dinner to which he objected—the trout, turkey, fiery Hungarian wine, and . . ."

"Well," cried Melanie, "and have no poets ever described a banquet? Did not Homer himself . . ."

Visitors were announced, and spared Cyrilla the defence of Homer. Melanie went to receive them in another and much more splendid apartment. It was one of the prerogatives of her high position in Exfort to have one day each week on which she held a sort of diminutive court, receiving with equal dignity and condescension the wives of the various assessors, counsellors, and directors, of whom her husband was the chief, and also of the officers whose families wished to be on her visiting list, and desired to be invited to her house. Like all great people, she complained much of the toils incumbent on her station; but the individuals who had attempted to relieve her of part of the burden by absenting themselves, were made to feel in no slight degree, not only her displeasure, but that of the President also! Yet he was a man of gravity and wisdom, who professed to despise the absurdities of etiquette; and Melanie not unfrequently soared in idea so far beyond this world, as to view the inhabitants as ants, and find all their pursuits as apparently futile! Such are the inconsistencies that meet the observer on all occasions, and in all ranks of society.

A few hours afterwards the President entered the drawing-room, rubbing his hands in the satisfied manner of a man who considers that those members of his body have been sufficiently diligent to deserve a little recreation. "I rather enjoy the idea of a musical evening," he began; "we shall be alone, I believe, and Cyrilla has promised . . ."

"The weather is so fine," said Melanie, "that we intend to drive out after dinner; and the Bellegardes have asked us to spend the rest of the evening with them."

“That is,” said Cyrilla, “they have proposed our driving to Freilands, where they intend to give a supper.”

“Humph! there will be wild doings there this evening—dancing, of course.”

“Very little,” said Melanie; “we intend to walk through the grounds and gardens, to ascertain how far the spring is advanced.”

“And the flirtations also,” said the President, dryly; “how many score of officers do you expect?”

“I am not aware of any being invited, excepting Rupert.”

“Klemmhein will be there quite as certainly as Rupert, I can tell you. You know as well as I do that he must be in attendance ‘to walk through the grounds and gardens’ with Madame de Bellegarde. Why, if she by any chance should happen to forget him, her husband, with that admirable gallantry peculiar to his nation, would himself invite him!”

“I did not think you would condescend to repeat such gossip.”

“Is it gossip? I flattered myself you would imagine me capable of making the remark from personal observation. It is quite as evident as that Julie intends to marry Edouard if his wife should die, as all the Lindesmars predict she will do a few months hence.”

“Julie and Edouard!” exclaimed Melanie; “that would be too ridiculous. On that subject I can assure you that you are mistaken; he would never think of her.”

“I did not say he would; I said she thought of him, as she does of any and every one who is eligible.”

“You must have a very bad opinion of her,” said Cyrilla, “if you suppose her capable of endeavouring to attract the attention or gain the affection of a . . . married man.”

“A very exalted opinion of her I certainly have not, or of any of her family, or indeed of any of those French people who followed Jérôme Buonaparte into our country, and have remained here to engraft their licentious liveliness on our society, and imperceptibly corrupt all around them by their example.”

“I always imagined you liked the Bellegardes,” said

Melanie. "You have never made the slightest objection to their being invited to our house."

"Nor shall I now; they are a necessary evil here—unavoidable, amusing, worthless people, who flutter through life without a thought beyond it."

"They are not worse than other people in their rank of life," interposed Melanie, with some irritability.

"I think they are," said the President; "because they are almost totally uneducated, and want of education is more dangerous in their rank than in any other."

"Dangerous?" repeated Melanie, inquiringly.

"Yes; for the female portion of the higher classes of society are, from want of employment, more led into temptation of levity of conduct than the middle and lower classes; their principal pursuit, pleasure or amusement, naturally induces them to seek the company of those similarly situated. No steadying duties of every day recurrence bind them to their families; tutors, governesses, housekeepers, and servants, supply their places. Generally endowed with sensitive feelings, quick perceptions, and not unfrequently a considerable portion of intellect, occupation of some kind or other becomes absolutely necessary. What use the Bellegardes and Lindesmars make of their best feelings and fair proportion of intelligence, I leave you to judge."

"I will not condemn them," said Melanie, smiling; "for in doing so, I should condemn myself—our mode of life is similar."

"Not quite," said the President; "though you devote more time than is necessary to sleep and your toilet, you find some hours every day for the improvement of your mind, and make an occasional effort to be of use to your fellow-creatures, when it does not cost what you consider too much time and trouble; besides, our house has not yet become the place of rendezvous for the idle and worthless, and I shall take care that the Bellegardes do not make it such. I have therefore no objection to see them here, no objection that you should go to them, excepting when they are what they call *en petit comité*,

which means, in free translation, 'at little devilry.' I ought not to have been told anything about this supper, to which I am of course not invited, as I should be considered a restraint and a bore; but I could tell you exactly who will be there, and what they will do and say."

"Perhaps, Melanie," said Cyrilla, "it would be better if we sent an excuse; we can go to Freilands whenever we like, you know."

"It will be very rude, after having agreed to all Adrienne's arrangements."

"I hope you will go," said the President, taking up a newspaper; "in fact I wish it, as I do not choose to be called a spoilsport or tyrant, though I dare say in that worshipful society I have already obtained both denominations."

Melanie walked towards Cyrilla, and pretended to play with her ringlets, as she bent over her, and whispered: "I hope you are satisfied now, and that you enjoy the idea of the supper, without reserve?"

"Not at all; I should greatly prefer staying at home."

"If you do, he will be dissatisfied also. You will go, but with a greatly diminished sense of enjoyment. What have you gained?"

"The consciousness of having avoided an unnecessary concealment," answered Cyrilla, calmly.





CHAPTER XXX.



ON assembling at the Bellegardes, Rupert alone was missing, and, after waiting more than half an hour, M. de Bellegarde, who on all such occasions was chief director and arranger, proposed setting off without further delay.

“But,” whispered his wife, “we have no places for Cyrilla and Julie.”

“O, Victor will be but too happy to take Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron in my father’s droschka.”

“No, thank you,” said Cyrilla, laughing; “although I have every intention of becoming, in the course of time, very well acquainted with Count Lindesmar, I think for the present it would be better if Julie were to go with him, and I remained until Rupert thinks proper to make his appearance.”

Count Lindesmar, a black-haired, black-eyed, very sallow and very animated-looking young man, who had been speaking to Zorndorff, turned suddenly round, and, joining in Cyrilla’s laugh, exhibited two rows of the whitest teeth imaginable: “*Eh bien, ma chère Julie . . . faute de mieux . . .*”

“And you,” said the Countess Zorndorff to Cyrilla, almost beseechingly,—“You will go with us?”

“To be sure she will,” said Madame de Bellegarde, quickly. “I wonder we did not think of all this an hour ago.”

Cyrilla would willingly have declined; but she could find no plausible excuse: so in the course of a few minutes

she found herself sitting opposite Zorndorff, and beside his wife; while odd speculations as to what his thoughts might be so occupied her mind, that she remained perfectly silent for a considerable time. He was no less so; but the Countess informed her that, though unable to sleep almost all night, she had been mesmerized in the afternoon, and now felt quite equal to the expected fatigues of the evening. The wish to see Cyrilla had been her principal inducement to brave them, "Because," she added with a smile, "I hope to make you forget yesterday night, and to persuade you to come to me sometimes. I have quite resolved not to yield to any feeling of nervousness this evening."

"A steady resolution of that kind would be of more use to you than any mesmerizer," said Cyrilla. "The mind has incalculable influence on the nerves."

"So I have been told; but, unfortunately, I am not at all strong-minded . . . you are, I suppose."

Cyrilla shook her head.

"But at least you are not nervous?"

"N-o; I believe not."

"Most probably your nerves have never been tried like mine. You have led a happy life, free from domestic misfortunes. Now, I lost my mother when still quite a child. . . ."

"And I my father," said Cyrilla.

"But *my* father died in so sudden and unexpected a manner, that, though he had long been in a dangerous state of health, and I was in some degree prepared by our physician for the event, I suffered terribly from the shock—didn't I, Edouard?" You know how ill I was for more than a week! Fortunately," she continued, turning to Cyrilla,—“Fortunately, it was after my marriage, or I think I could not have survived his loss. The death of the last parent breaks up one's home, and throws a woman, if still unmarried, so completely on the world, or, what is nearly the same thing, on relations who seldom care for her. At least that would have been my case.”

"It was mine," said Cyrilla, gravely.

“Why, I thought your mother still lived . . . was she long ill?” asked the Countess, with that determination to talk of illness and death which seems peculiar to unhealthy people.

“Like your father, she had long been in a precarious state of health, but her death was awfully sudden.”

“Indeed! Were you present?”

“Yes. She died . . . while making an effort to . . . speak to me.”

“O, Margaret!” exclaimed Zorndorff, reproachfully, “how can you question Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron in this way?”

“Because there seems such an extraordinary similitude in our trials. Still I have had one,” she continued, turning to Cyrilla, “one more than you . . . the terrible uncertainties and anxieties to which Edouard subjected me before our marriage. Of them you can form no idea!” and she glanced archly towards Zorndorff, who made no attempt to defend himself.

“But to return to your nerves,” said Cyrilla, with a faint smile. “If you will permit me to offer you advice on so short an acquaintance, I should recommend a constant struggle against what you call nervousness, and, what is equally important, a resolution never to speak of it. Endeavour to banish it altogether from your mind.”

“Impossible; I can scarcely ever think of anything else.”

“Suppose you were to find some kind of employment to interest you?”

“I have tried . . . everything . . . but . . . nothing interests me . . . I cannot bear the exertion of any of the employments which give pleasure to other people.”

“There are some which require scarcely any exertion, if merely pursued for amusement,” suggested Cyrilla. “Drawing or painting, for instance.”

“My health never admitted of my making sufficient progress in either to find them agreeable.”

“Reading?”

“Yes, I like reading . . . sometimes . . . but the

works I prefer Edouard thinks dangerous and exciting for me. Formerly he used to like to talk to me about philosophy and the other world, and now he wishes I could forget all he has ever said, and become a downright religious bigot. He says that women who have contracted ideas are infinitely happier than those who give scope to their imagination, and precipitate themselves into a chaos of thought, which they have neither the power nor inclination to order."

"But may not true religion lie between these extremes? May not the middle course, as in most cases, be the best?" asked Cyrilla.

"I don't know. He says, now, that all women ought to be Roman-catholics—that the more they believe, and the less they trouble themselves with religious speculations, the better."

Cyrilla looked inquiringly towards Zorndorff; but he appeared to be watching for the re-appearance of the other carriages, hid by a turn of the road, and she renewed her well-meant efforts to benefit her companion by observing, "I have not yet exhausted all our employments—most women like needlework."

"I do not, excepting when I have somebody to talk to me."

"Well," said Cyrilla, "perhaps you like music?"

"For music I have no talent whatever—rather a fortunate circumstance, as Edouard does not care for it, and actually dislikes the sound of the Jew's harp, the only instrument that gives me unalloyed pleasure."

"The—the—what did you say?"

"The Jew's harp, drone, iron trump, or whatever it may be called. Mesmer used it frequently for the propagation and transmission of magnetic influence."

"I have never even heard of it," said Cyrilla. "How is it played?"

"In the easiest way possible," she answered, drawing from the pocket of her dress a small iron machine, which Cyrilla, in her ignorance, might have imagined a boot-hook, portable screw, or anything but a musical instru-

ment, and placing it between her teeth, began to thrum upon it with extraordinary diligence.

Cyrilla's look of surprise changed into one of painful uncertainty, as the harsh monotonous sound grated on her well-exercised musical ear; and when the flashing eyes fixed on hers, in glaring interrogation, convinced her that no jest was intended, she unconsciously drew back into the corner of the carriage, her lips apart, and distrust legible in every feature.

"Margaret, I request . . . I entreat . . ." began Zorndorff.

But Margaret did not choose to hear, and continued her performance, exhibiting a degree of skill which might have attracted Cyrilla's attention had her mind been less occupied.

"Margaret, I . . . *insist*," cried Zorndorff, at last catching her hand, so as to cause an immediate cessation of the vibrating sounds. "How can you . . . before Mademoiselle Adlerkron and . . ." He looked towards the servants, half expecting to detect the covert expression of a sense of the ludicrous, which even the best bred footmen cannot always subdue, instead of which he observed that the coachman was beginning to draw up the carriage on the grass beside the road, while both he and his companion eagerly watched some object at the end of the long line of road before them.

"What is it?" cried Zorndorff, starting up.

The coachman pointed with his whip to a carriage which neared them with frightful rapidity, and at the same moment the wild stamping of horses at full speed became audible.

"Who can be driving in that mad way?" cried Zorndorff.

"No one that can help it," replied the coachman; "but I suspect Baron Adlerkron has been trying the young bays he bought a few days ago, and they have gone off with him."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Cyrilla, "can no one do anything to save him? . . . He will be killed! . . . he will be killed! Oh, let me out," she added eagerly, endeavouring to pass Zorndorff.

He held her back, but sprang himself to the ground.

For about a minute—which appeared an eternity—they watched the coming danger, as the horses became visible. The light carriage to which they were attached seemed to bound along the road, jerking from side to side, in a manner threatening instant destruction. When within about a hundred yards of him, Zorndorff suddenly rushed into the middle of the road, waving his hat and arms above his head in a manner likely to attract the horses' attention. They still, however, advanced, snorting furiously, and there seemed but the alternative of sudden and violent death to him or to Rupert, who, though still holding the reins, had long lost all command over the exasperated animals. On Zorndorff's continuing courageously to oppose their passage, they reeled from side to side, perhaps endeavouring to pass him—urged by the force of that generous instinct which, it is said, prevents a horse from willingly trampling on a human being. The moment they wavered and ceased to pull together, he sprang forward and seized their heads, his footman came to his assistance, Rupert drew up the reins, the other carriages drove up, servants hurried forward, and a scene of joyous confusion followed.

“Zorndorff,” cried Rupert, extending his hand, “you have in all probability saved not only my life, but several others also. As long as I had the road clear, my fears were lost in excitement; but no sooner did I observe the advancing line of carriages, than a feeling of horror at the impending concussion and crash, which appeared inevitable, completely overpowered me.”

“But,” said Melanie, “tell us how it happened. Is there anything on the road likely to frighten horses?”

“Nothing whatever,” replied Rupert; “it was all my own fault. I only received your note half-an-hour ago, and, wishing to get into Exfort as quickly as possible, ordered a pair of horses that had not been out for some days; delayed a few minutes giving directions about a tent on the lawn, which I thought Adrienne would like; I endeavoured to regain the lost time by . . . Hallo!” he cried, springing forward on seeing Zorndorff's carriage

turned round, and beginning to wind its way through the others, "I say . . . Zorndorff . . . you are not going to desert us, are you?—why I have not had time to thank you or say how much I admire your presence of mind."

"Let us suppose it said," answered Zorndorff, bending slightly forward. "Margaret is ill, and I must return home with her."

"Come on to Freilands, it is much nearer."

"Can I be of any use, Edouard?" asked Melanie.

"No, thank you . . . none whatever," he replied, drawing his wife towards him with one arm, while with the other he made a sign to the coachman to drive on.

Rupert turned to Cyrilla, who was sitting under a poplar tree, silent and pale, and asked her if she would trust herself to his care.

"Willingly, if you will walk with me through the park. I would rather not hear or see anything more of horses or carriages for an hour or two."

"I can easily imagine it, after being so disagreeably alarmed; it must have been particularly painful to witness."

"Oh," cried Julie, joining them, "it was quite dreadful . . . shocking . . . I really thought I should have fainted—indeed it would have been quite natural if we had all done so; but Margaret Zorndorff is the only one who can get up anything of that kind among us.—However, when so many things have the power of making her faint or fall asleep, it would be unpardonable had she remained unmoved when that glorious creature was in such imminent danger!"

"Which glorious creature?" asked Rupert, smiling.

"We were three—my groom, myself, and Zorndorff!"

"Ah, bah! who ever thought of your groom?"

"I did," answered Rupert. "His life to him and his family is quite as valuable as mine or Zorndorff's to us and ours; and had he lost it by my impatience and thoughtlessness, it would have been a subject of unceasing regret to me,—that is, supposing I had survived him."

"I trust," said Melanie, shaking her head, and looking upwards, "I trust I may never again see two beings so dear to me in such peril."

“Rupert begs you will say three beings,” interposed Julie, laughing; “he insists on his groom being considered either a glorious creature, like your nephew, or a dear being, like himself.”

“The expressions are strong,” said Melanie; “but in point of fact, he is right. There were three human beings in the same danger, and I confess with shame I saw but two.”

“You are better than those who saw but one,” said Julie.

“Was that your case?” asked Rupert, carelessly.

“I . . . I was thinking of Margaret when I made the remark; and she may be pardoned for thinking only of Zorndorff, as he seems to exist now merely for her and her whims. Who ever expected that he would be so patient, so minutely attentive? he who was so accustomed to receive attentions himself, I may say. By the bye, Cyrilla, did you observe how closely he held her, and how oddly he pressed her head against his shoulder, as they drove off?”

“No; I did not look at them.”

“It appeared to me,” continued Julie, “as if he feared any one should see her face.”

“I think we had better go on to Freilands,” observed Melanie, abruptly; “it is getting late.”

“Cyrilla wishes to walk through the park,” said Rupert; “and the way is so much shorter than by the road, that most probably we shall reach the house as soon as you.”

“An excellent idea,” said Julie, turning to her brother; “let us go with them,”—and they sauntered on together, followed by Rupert and Cyrilla.

“I did not think there was such a gloomy spot in all Freilands,” observed Julie, soon after they entered the park; “quite awful, I declare—enough to make one shudder!”

“You are surely not so unreasonable as to expect the cheerfulness of noon so late in the evening,” said Rupert. “At an earlier hour it is gay enough here, I assure you.”

“Oh,” said Julie, looking round her, “do not for a moment imagine I think your wood more dreary than others. I dislike sunless places of this kind at all times, because they provoke disagreeable thoughts about growing old, and dying, and all sorts of dismal things.”

“And do such thoughts never occur to you elsewhere?” asked Cyrilla.

“Very seldom, and I always banish them as soon as possible. Life is short, and I wish to enjoy it!”

“I believe,” said her brother, “you have contrived to do so more than most people.”

“I . . . don’t . . . know. Rupert, what is your opinion? You know more of me and my life than Victor does.”

“If living in a constant round of dissipation, and being among the leaders of fashion in your circle, be enjoyment,” answered Rupert, “you have had a more than common share of it. Whether or not you consider it such, and are satisfied, it is impossible for me to say.”

“No, I am not satisfied; I feel as if the last ten years of my life had been a continued series of disappointments.”

There was a good deal of mirthful meaning in Rupert’s glance, as he looked at her and suppressed a laugh.

“You misunderstand me,” she continued, half laughing, and slightly colouring. “I did not mean the disappointments of which such as you have been the cause. I referred to the daily, hourly expectation of pleasure which is never fulfilled.”

“That is, you find your pleasures, when attained, worthless, or at least insipid.”

“Perhaps so. Change is, I believe, the only remedy. Even Exfort, after Berlin, was agreeable for some time.”

“Give up the pursuit of pleasure altogether,” said Rupert, “and become a useful member of society, as I intend to be a few months hence.”

“And what may be your first steps towards usefulness?”

“I shall leave the army and reside either at Windhorst or Freilands, sow and reap, feed oxen and swine, drain marshes and plant trees, establish schools and administer

justice. I rather expect that the increased usefulness of my life, and consequent satisfaction, will give me an air of dignity and respectability, which I shall certainly never acquire while riding about with my regiment and living in garrison towns."

"An air of portliness and vulgarity, you mean."

"Scarcely," said Rupert, laughing; "for our branch of the Adlerkrons have all been long-legged, haggard, gentlemanly-looking men."

"But you will never be able to play *grand seigneur* as Count Zorndorff already manages to do in his little suburban villa. Well may Melanie say that he seems born to greatness, and has an innate appreciation of the refinements of luxury! What a prince he would have made!"

"I should rather not belong to his household if he were one," said Rupert.

"Perhaps not, with Margaret for a princess; but he might be separated from her, you know, and choose another."

"You, for instance," suggested Rupert.

"Why not? I should suit him better than she does, and would promise to shut up the private staircase to his study that annoys him so much; would refrain from examining his letters or asking him impertinent questions about certain American correspondents and pensioners; would . . ."

"Julie!" cried Count Lindesmar, "how can you talk in this wild way? Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron is quite shocked."

"Not a bit. Cyrilla and every one knows that Count Zorndorff married for wealth, and not in the least from inclination. His attention to Margaret is extremely laudable, no doubt; but it would be better for her health if he encouraged her fancies less, and did not allow her to employ three physicians at once. Is it not enough to kill any woman when an alleopath, hydropath, and homœopath daily prescribe for her—and she is herself mesmerized, that, when in a state of sleepwaking, as she calls her siesta, she may consider or dream which prescription she will follow for the succeeding four-and-twenty hours? Indulg-

ence of this kind, on the part of a man such as he is, very much resembles killing with kindness."

"What devilish motives you give to conduct we all considered the perfection of patience!" said Rupert.

"I am convinced you think my guess not far amiss."

"You are making Zorndorff a consummate villain!"

"Not so. If I were married to-morrow, I should have no objection to my husband's endeavouring to kill me by excess of indulgence."

"And I suppose you give him equally detestable motives for his personal attentions!" said Rupert.

"You look so indignant that I shall not say so, even if I do," answered Julie, laughing. "But the fact is, I do not believe Count Zorndorff could be otherwise. No one ever accused him of want of attention to our sex, excepting when he wished to pique them into paying attention to him. I could tell you some of his exploits . . ."

"Pray, don't," said Cyrilla, walking on with Rupert, and leaving her to continue her conversation with her brother, whose repeated bursts of laughter proved that she had found a listener more disposed to be amused at than to criticize her remarks. Separated as they had been for many years, her conversation was alike new and amusing to him; the total absence of all reserve on her part being naturally attributed to their near relationship. This was, however, by no means the case. Julie de Lindesmar, after having danced and flirted away fifteen of the best years of her life, on finding the consciousness of age forced upon her by successive rising generations, had, in order to secure the consideration and attention to which she had been accustomed in society, fallen into the fatal error of adopting a freedom of manner and speech which, while it attracted, caused her to become the jest of all her acquaintance, and the subject of various not very creditable bets. She gained her object, however, and always found men ready to dance with her, flirt with her, joke with her, and follow her wherever she went. By no means devoid of intellect, there were moments when she felt humiliated, angry with herself and all the world, and wished to recede.

As well might she endeavour to do so in years as in conduct. Every attempt at prudery was treated with scorn or derision even by the merest boy-lieutenant of her coterie ; and thus, with many good qualities, known only to her nearest relations, she continued her struggle with the world and its vanities, imperceptibly becoming that most unhappy but fortunately rare member of society—a disreputable old maid !

“ I cannot tell you, Cyrilla,” said Rupert, after he had walked beside her in silence for some minutes ; “ I cannot tell you how I regret what has occurred this evening between Zorndorff and me. To be placed under so great an obligation to him just now is most unpleasant ; but there is no use in attempting to lessen it. He showed both courage and presence of mind on the occasion, and was at one time in greater danger than I was.”

“ I know it,” said Cyrilla, in a low voice ; “ and I admired his steadiness as much as any one who witnessed it.”

“ And yet,” said Rupert, half inquiringly, “ I think his conduct afterwards to that hypochondriacal half crazy wife of his infinitely more admirable.”

Cyrilla was silent.

“ What he did for me,” continued Rupert, “ I believe I could have done for him . . . should at all events have attempted it ; at least, I hope so . . . but patience such as his, attentions so unwearied towards a woman I had never cared for, is a refinement of feeling in which I suspect I should, in his place, have been found wanting.”

Still Cyrilla remained silent, and after a pause, Rupert added : “ The new light which this throws upon Zorndorff’s character gives me great satisfaction. A man who can act so irreproachably, under such trying circumstances, can hardly hesitate to release you from this con—founded promise . . . even though ever so much against his inclinations, eh ?”

“ I am afraid you are mistaken ; but remember the time stipulated for explanation has not yet arrived.”

“ I know it ; but patience is not the predominant virtue of our family ; two months have already passed over, and

I have a strong suspicion that, until yesterday evening, you did not speak one word to him."

"You are right," said Cyrilla; "at first he avoided me, and latterly I had not courage."

"The impropriety of being now in any way bound to him ought to stimulate you."

"Dear Rupert, you do not know what you are saying."

"Perhaps not; I feel in this affair very like a man groping about in the dark; this morning, however, a light broke upon me from an unexpected quarter, and I have become intensely anxious to know Zorndorff's intentions."

"Have patience, Rupert . . . only a few weeks longer."

"Be it so; but, in the mean time, should the President and Melanie come to Freilands, it will be difficult to avoid inviting the Zorndorffs occasionally . . . have you any objection to seeing them here?"

"None whatever," replied Cyrilla; "if you will but keep your promise never to speak to him about me."

"Oh," cried Julie, springing forward; "how pleasant it is to see the blue sky and a little sunshine again; this meadow is quite refreshing; and there is our dear old balcony, and . . . and I do believe you have got a tent upon the lawn!"

They hurried forward, and were met by Madame de Bellegarde, who immediately exclaimed, "O Rupert, you dear creature, how can I sufficiently thank you for this charming surprise!"

"If you mean the tent, I must tell you that it was pitched this morning."

"But the candelabra and the beautiful flowers . . ."

"Thank me for them, by all means," said Rupert, laughing.

"I have ordered supper at ten o'clock," she said, looking round her; "so we have time to take a long stroll and go on the lake—Mr. de Klemmhein has offered to row me."

"You will find it cold," said Rupert.

"Oh, do just bring me a shawl out of the carriage, will you?" she said, turning to Klemmhein, who of course flew to obey her commands.

“And besides,” continued Rupert, “some of the boats are being painted, and others are not yet repaired.”

“But I want to see the Swiss cottage you have built on the island. I have heard that it is quite beautiful, and that a family could live in it; that there is a dear little kitchen, and a love of a dairy, and two darling live cows”

“I intended you to see all the next time you were *my* guest,” said Rupert; “suppose we say to-morrow, if Melanie have no objection.”

Melanie agreed, and Rupert continued, “Who will inspect my new conservatory, and the road through the old forest?”

Melanie and Cyrilla immediately joined him; some others followed, the conservatory was admired, bouquets distributed; but as they began to approach the skirts of the wood, their companions dropped off one by one, and the three cousins soon found themselves alone.





CHAPTER XXXI.

BENEATH the delicate spring foliage of the fine old trees which had once formed part of a well-known forest, Rupert and his cousins walked on, at first unconscious of the defection of the rest of the party, and, when aware of it, rather disposed to rejoice than otherwise. Carefully and judiciously cleared, the ground was covered with various luxuriant plants, on which the sunbeams vainly endeavoured to find a resting-place: wherever the light contrived to pierce the interlaced boughs, it seemed but to waver over the surface of the dark vegetation beneath, or trembled on the more lustrous leaves like dewdrops ever ready to fall. The silence was complete, for the gay singing-birds, like Julie and her companions, preferred the perfumed shrubberies near the house, the lime-trees and syringas at the lake, to the gloomy grandeur of the forest. Full many a flower had there “blushed unseen,” and “wasted its sweetness” . . . perhaps not . . . who can tell what measure of enjoyment those primroses and wild anemones may give that fluttering moth, as it hurries from one to the other? Or is that busy goldlike beetle utterly insensible to the wondrous beauty and endless variety of the surrounding mosses, lichens, and grasses—the graceful elegance of the waving fern? Melanie thinks not; she honours him by a comparison with man, speculates on the domestic cares and joys of the liliputian mansion he is seeking under blades of grass and dried leaves of the previous year—benignantly she smiles, and aids him with the

carved ivory handle of her pink parasol. . . . She might, in her generosity, have overwhelmed him with the profusion of gifts which cost her nothing, had not a couple of ants, toiling forward with a thin withered twig, attracted her attention. Great were their exertions, unceasing their perseverance, and Melanie, while contemplating the pertinacity of their efforts, moralized on its similitude with that of men whose struggles in this world might be watched by a superior order of beings, with the same commiserating contempt that she now bestowed on the labours of the ants!

“What beings!” asked Rupert; “the ghosts or the inhabitants of another planet?”

Melanie did not answer; her eyes were now fixed on a bright lizard that, gliding from among the roots of an oak, stopped suddenly, and remained so immovable that it might have been supposed dead, had not the brilliant eyes proved the contrary.

“Beautiful little animal!” apostrophized Melanie: “beloved of the writers of fairy tales, who have invariably endowed thee with wisdom and learning, not unfrequently with unlimited power! Is it fear or wonder that keeps thee motionless?”

“Wonder, undoubtedly,” said Rupert; “he is evidently transfixed with astonishment at your address. If he could speak, and wished to preserve his character for wisdom, he would tell you to walk on, and endeavour to reach the lake before the sun has gone down.”

“He would say no such thing,” said Melanie, smiling; “he would rather tell me to avoid such conventional expressions as ‘the sun is going down,’ when I know, and everybody knows, the sun does not go down.”

“Then he is a pedant, and we will leave him alone to his wisdom, and get on as fast as we can to the lake.”

“I am in no hurry to leave your wood,” said Melanie; “this solitude is elevating, grand, sublime! Everything here compels me to feel the unsearchable perfections of the works of God, and the mysterious relationship which exists between us and the whole creation.”

“Lizards inclusive!” cried Rupert. “I say, Cyrilla,” he added, pointing down a long green avenue to a magnificent stag that trotted lightly towards them, “I have no objection to acknowledge a relationship with that fine fellow and all his family. Leave Melanie her learned lizard, and let us try to get a nearer view of our noble relations.”

They proved, however, somewhat difficult of approach: too well nurtured to be wild, they nevertheless exhibited a degree of timidity so mixed with stateliness, that it strongly resembled the proud shyness not unfrequently found in men of noble race. They occasionally stopped, gazed haughtily round, moved on a few steps, grazed a little, trotted a little, and, in short, managed successfully to keep their admiring pursuers at a respectful distance.

Melanie walked on pensively,—not a plant, flower, or visible insect escaped her notice. The distant herd of deer, Cyrilla’s white dress and fluttering ribbons appearing and disappearing in the distance,—Rupert’s boyish springs, and even the odd hunting-call with which he endeavoured to attract the fearful doe and flying stag towards him,—all added to her enjoyment; a mixed feeling of religious awe and poetic inspiration came over her, and, ever prepared for such moments, she crossed one of the numerous grass avenues, and entering a beech-grove beyond, sat down beneath one of the trees, drew her little red morocco note-book from her pocket, and, after a short reverie, began to write.

It was here that she was found soon after by her breathless companions; and while Cyrilla lightly threw herself on the ground beside her, playfully endeavouring to look over her shoulder, Rupert contemplated, with folded arms, first his cousins and then his beech-trees. Whatever he thought of the former, he kept to himself; on the beauty of the latter, notwithstanding Cyrilla’s signs of silence, he became eloquent, nor ceased until she bent back her head, and, following the direction of his eyes, admired the tall straight trunks which, cleared of all underwood, had grown to an unusual height.

“You might have found a prettier place to write your verses, Melanie,” he said, looking round: “I had no idea you were such an admirer of woods and forests, or I should have brought you here long ago. A little further on is my favourite spot, just where the river flows into the lake, and one can run in with a boat under the trees. Cyrilla shall read me your verses there, and if we find them appropriate, they shall be painted upon wood, in the form of a shield, and hung on the tree opposite to a bench which has lately been erected: that shall be our trysting-place in future.”

“Painted upon wood,” repeated Cyrilla; “O, you unpoetical animal! Had you said you would cut them in the bark of a tree, perhaps she might have given them to you, but you have no chance now.”

“The bark of the tree in question,” said Rupert, “has already been taken possession of by some one who discovered and enjoyed the seclusion of the spot before I did.”

“Your predecessor, most probably.”

“Certainly not, the letters are too recently engraved; a year—two years at most.”

“And their purport?”

“Their purport,” replied Rupert, “betrayed the author to me; mysterious words making allusion to the first and last letters of the alphabet, which, being interpreted, I think, mean Adlerkron and Zorndorff,—something about the stream of destiny, the chains of strong necessity, and all that sort of thing. The letters are the oldest Saxon, and I do not know any one but Zorndorff likely to write in what are hieroglyphics to the vulgar eye. For my part, had I been disposed to play pastoral, you would have seen your name in sprawling characters by this time, whereas he carved so delicately, that they have only now become visible at a little distance.”

No one seemed disposed to pursue the topic, and they walked on in silence for some time. Although the trees were far apart, the shade had become deeper, almost gloomy, perhaps the subject of thought or train of reflection also. They were glad when, emerging from the wood, they once more saw the clear sky, and nothing but a gentle

declivity between them and the lake. As they descended it, Rupert pointed to where, after forming a small bay, a dark-coloured river noiselessly discharged itself into the bright expanse of waveless water before them.

"I should like to explore," said Cyrilla: "if it were not too late, we might follow the course of the river, and see to what it leads."

"To a marsh, extensive bogs, and another lake," said Rupert; "all which are dignified with the name of moorland on the map. The President, however, thinks that by a judicious system of drainage, and top-dressing, I might make Freilands twice as valuable as it is; and I intend to try, as it will be an occupation for me this summer. You will always find a boat under the trees here, and if you do not think it too late now to undertake a voyage to the upper lake"

"O, much too late," cried Melanie, quickly; "besides, you told Adrienne that the boats were out of repair."

"Some of them are," said Rupert, laughing; "but there are two or three in very good order, and this is one of them. You had better let me row you across the lake instead of returning through the wood, where, after sunset, it is disagreeably dark under the old trees."

While he stooped to loosen the boat, Melanie and Cyrilla sat down on a long rustic bench, and at the same moment looked towards the opposite tree, and discovered the Saxon letters of which Rupert had spoken.

"I should never have suspected him of doing anything so . . . so puerile," observed Cyrilla.

"He has a way of doing such things that deprives them of every trace of absurdity," said Rupert, turning round. "I am convinced those letters were engraved with the greatest solemnity, and were never intended for profane eyes. This tree was surrounded by others at the time, for the clearing of the hill was made by my orders when I was here alone last summer. That he will consider the discovery an omen of some kind or other is certain . . . don't you think so, Melanie?"

"I think . . . it is not quite . . . improbable," she answered, rather unwillingly.

"I should not be surprised if he came here some day to erase the letters," said Rupert: "nothing he dislikes so much as my discovering anything of this kind."

"I'm sure I don't wonder at it—you are so merciless in your ridicule."

"I intend this time to be more than merciful," rejoined Rupert. "I shall be silent. In fact," he added, as he assisted them into the boat, "if the tree were not so beautiful, and if it did not grow so very gracefully over the water, I should probably have condemned it with the others, which, of course, would have been a bad omen for Zorndorff. However, he shall enjoy all his omens in peace; and I may preserve my tree, if Cyrilla will but show a little of the courage which procured for our ancestors the sobriquet of eagles (Adler)."

Cyrilla did not choose to answer. She bent over the boat and drew her fingers through the water; while Rupert, who was seldom long silent, continued his conversation with Melanie. "I shall never," he said, "be able to understand Zorndorff. While making pretension to be among the most enlightened of the enlightened, he evinces reverence for things that are treated with contempt by the most commonplace description of people. It is incomprehensible to me how any rational man can allow his conduct to be influenced in these days of enlightenment by an astrologer, as Zorndorff has done, and is doing."

"I think you are mistaken about that," said Melanie.

"Not a bit . . . I tell you he has not the smallest doubt, that everything predicted by that charlatan friend of his will come to pass."

"He . . . he assured me," said Melanie, "that all about the astrologer was a jest."

"I wish it were," rejoined Rupert, with unusual seriousness, as he rested on his oars; "for his determination to fulfil this same destiny may cause me, and some one I like better than myself, much annoyance. Believing, as I do, that deeds make destiny . . ."

"O Rupert," cried Melanie, interrupting him, "how many events in life occur over which our actions have had no influence!"

"Very few, I suspect, that might not, if conscientiously pursued to their source, be traced to ourselves, cases of illness and natural death excepted."

"Rupert is right," said Cyrilla, thoughtfully, as she recalled the few events of her life, and felt how painfully her deeds were influencing her lot in life. Had he been thinking of her? Did he begin to suspect anything? She looked up. He was rowing slowly—his eyes intently fixed on the oar, which was just then serving as rudder, Cyrilla having altogether forgotten that she had undertaken to steer.

"Before we pursue our subject, Rupert," began Melanie, "I should like to know if we understand the word destiny in the same sense. I know you are no fatalist . . ."

"Certainly not, or else I should not attach so much importance to our deeds," answered Rupert, smiling. "However, instead of talking about the word, let me tell you, without reserve, what I mean. I must begin by saying that I know Zorndorff well, better and longer than you; for although his father and my uncle naturally avoided each other's society, we contrived to become intimate even when boys, and still more so after being together at the university. Eminently talented, he was also proud and overbearing to a degree that often turned his warmest admirers into enemies; and on one occasion provoked a duel which might have ended very unpleasantly for him, if I had not carried off his wounded adversary to Windhorst, and kept him there concealed until the inquiries about him ceased, and a desperate sabre wound on his face had healed. For this small service Zorndorff chose to honour me with the name of *friend*, and bestowed on me then more of his confidence than is quite agreeable to him now. He spoke unreservedly of his acquaintance with the astrologer, and I remember even introduced me to him somewhere or other."

"Indeed! What sort of looking person was he?"

"A middle-aged, quiet, gentlemanly sort of fellow. I did not say much to him, as I had predetermined not to have my 'planet ruled.' I believe that is the proper expression."

"I remember," said Melanie, "your telling us one even-

ing at Freilands, that Edouard had said your destiny and his were connected. That you never asked to see the scheme of your horoscope is incomprehensible to me."

"To overcome my incredulity, as he called it," continued Rupert, "Zorndorff wrote out *his* and gave it to me. His disposition and talents were well described, but that made little impression on me, for the man knew him, both personally and by reputation, for several years; so I threw the paper aside, and retained but a very partial recollection of its contents."

Rupert paused.

"Well," said Melanie, "and what makes you think of it just now?"

"I found it when looking over some papers this morning," replied Rupert, "and was sorry to perceive something in it that may influence Zorndorff's conduct in a manner likely to be very . . . irritating to me."

"How so?"

"It says," answered Rupert, with the nearest approach to a scornful smile that Cyrilla had ever seen his well-formed mouth assume, "it says, first of all, that, by prudent conduct and at the proper *conjuncture*, he would obtain immense wealth by a woman . . ."

"You must allow," cried Melanie, eagerly, "that at least that has happened in the fullest sense of the words, and, I may say, without having been sought by Edouard—in fact, against his inclinations."

Rupert shook his head, looked at Cyrilla, and continued: "As for that part of it, I could myself have predicted something similar. Zorndorff had a serious way of joking about selling himself to the highest bidder, which, I suspect, was not lost on his friend. However, that does not concern me; but when he goes on to promise him—of course also, at the proper *conjuncture*, another marriage which is to give him all he most desires to possess—I cannot help feeling a suspicion that Zorndorff, in the expectation that his wife will die, already imagines Cyrilla doomed to be his, and my hopes that he will voluntarily release her from her promise have in consequence considerably diminished."

The impression made on both his hearers was too great to be unobserved even by Rupert: he looked at them alternately, and then continued, "I see you agree with me, and have only to add, that nothing but deeds will convince Zorndorff, or shake his confidence in his astrologer, whose predictions, of course, like the Delphic oracles, admit of various interpretations. Let Cyrilla but convince him that she will *not* be this second wife, and he will seek some one else to fulfil his destiny; perhaps Julie de Lindesmar, who seems of late to interest herself marvellously in all that concerns him."

"No, no, no," cried Melanie, shaking her head; "he never would, he never could think of her. But I do not quite understand," she added, turning to Cyrilla, "what the astrologer meant by *first* wealth and afterwards 'all he most desired to possess.' If the case had been reversed, why"

"It would not have been so applicable," said Rupert; "but the fact is, there is a good deal of oracle-like obscurity in the marriage-portion of the horoscope—the very words 'wealth' and 'all he most desired to possess,' with regard to him, bear nearly the same meaning. I have mentioned all these things, to make it evident to Cyrilla that her actions can henceforward seriously influence both Zorndorff's and mine; or, as he would say, 'our destinies are in her hands.'"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Cyrilla, with a look of dismay, as the consciousness of her complicated relations passed like a lowering cloud over her mind.

"The astrologer said this present year would be decisive for both of us," said Rupert, once more beginning to row vigorously; "and my present agreement with you, Cyrilla, oddly enough will lead to the verification of his words, almost as much as Zorndorff's scrupulous endeavours to fulfil the other predictions. Until to-day, I never comprehended his leaving his wife a few days after their marriage, to look at an old castle in Silesia which was to be sold—there were odd rumours that he had gone elsewhere at the time, but I now believe he really wished to purchase the old barrack of a place."

Melanie and Cyrilla remembered his visit to Salzburg, and looked at each other inquiringly.

“His disappointment about being too late for the sale was too remarkable not to be sincere,” continued Rupert; “and I have reason to know that he has been ever since desirous of purchasing something of the same kind. This morning I read the prediction that a great portion of his life would probably be spent in calm retirement from the world, in a castle of immense dimensions.”

“I have heard him speak to Wilhelm about giving up his ambitious schemes, and retiring to the country,” observed Melanie, thoughtfully, “but it is said that his attention to business is still as unwearied as ever.”

While still speaking, they had approached close to the island, and Rupert observed with surprise a small boat fastened at the landing-place, and a shawl thrown on the bank, which Melanie immediately recognized as Madame de Belle-gard’s. “I might have known that Adrienne would not wait until to-morrow, or give me the pleasure of surprising her with the others,” said Rupert, with some vexation; “*she* will, however, be surprised in a manner she little expects on the island! Now for the well-merited punishment,” he added, and, stooping down, he unfastened the boat, attached it to his own, and, notwithstanding all Melanie’s expostulations, began to pull towards the opposite shore.

“Rupert, just consider for a moment, she is probably alone with M. de Klemmhein . . .”

“She imagined herself so, I have no doubt, when she stepped on shore,” answered Rupert, laughing; “but by this time she has found out her mistake.”

“Who else is on the island?”

“Seven very good friends of Klemmhein’s—in fact, my dinner party are there drinking coffee and smoking. I did not know what to do when I received your note, until Arnheim proposed a retreat to the island, promising to remain there until I sent the fisher to let them know that we were at supper.”

“Major Arnheim!” exclaimed Melanie, “just the last

person Adrienne would like to meet under such circumstances."

"Stauffen is there also," said Rupert, apparently much amused; "two of the steadiest men in the regiment. Klemmhein will get a lecture from the one and a sermon from the other to-morrow morning, as sure as his name is Fritz."

"I don't care what he gets," said Melanie, impatiently, "but I cannot allow Adrienne to be left in such a predicament—only imagine her embarrassment!"

"Ah, bah! I daresay she is sitting with them as jolly as a bacchante."

"How the people in Exfort will talk!" continued Melanie, with heightened colour, "and put all sorts of odious constructions on her thoughtlessness—and our little coterie will suffer too, and the Freilands parties will be spoken of in a manner to make Wilhelm forbid our joining them in future."

Cyrilla looked grave, Rupert paused, considered a moment, and then turned the boat round to the island again. They landed and reached the cottage just in time to hear Madame de Bellegarde say, "That she only regretted the boat was too small for the whole party, but that she would send another for those who remained, as soon as possible."

"Capital!" whispered Rupert to Cyrilla, as they looked through the foliage of the trees, and saw the object of their solicitude standing amid a bevy of officers, whose flushed faces exhibited various expressions of surprise, amusement, and contempt.

"Klemmhein has betrayed us," cried Major Arnheim, laughing; "he knew that we were to dine with Adlerkron."

"Precisely," said Madame de Bellegarde, "and directly Rupert made difficulties about a boat, I suspected you were here, and insisted on coming myself to invite you to join us."

"Hang me," whispered Rupert, with a look of amazement, "if I know whether she is telling stories or not, but I rather think she is, for she fears Arnheim, and positively dislikes Stauffen. So," he added, coming forward, "so,

after all I said to you, here you are! *My* boat is large enough for the whole party, if you will allow us to return in yours. It is very kind of you to release my prisoners."

Madame de Bellegarde seemed charmed with this arrangement, and the embarkation was quiet enough; but no sooner had the larger and better-manned boat pulled out into the lake, than peals of laughter were wafted from it along the tranquil waters. Klemmhein murmured the words, "Confound them," as he looked over his shoulder towards Rupert, whose sparkling eyes contrasted oddly with the forced gravity of his other features. Madame de Bellegarde bent forward, and, clenching her fingers, shook the diminutive fist so formed at the latter, while she volubly poured forth a succession of unreasonable reproaches.

"It is not my fault, Adrienne," he answered, laughing, "that you chose to go on a voyage of discovery, and found an island inhabited by savages! I am sure I said enough to deter any one but you from going on the lake this evening; even Julie refrained, when she heard I wished to surprise her with my cottage to-morrow."

"But," persisted Madame de Bellegarde, "instead of that stupid story about the boats not being in order, why did you not say those odious men were in the way?"

"Because they went out of the way."

"I don't understand . . ."

"They dined with me; and when I received Melanie's note, very good-naturedly proposed retiring to the island with their coffee and cigars. I am glad you have recompensed them by an invitation, which will be particularly welcome to Arnheim, as he can enjoy the society of some one confided to your care for this evening."

"Who? Is it Ida . . . or Hermine . . . or Adelheid?"

"That you must yourself discover. Arnheim praises you excessively . . . as chaperon; he says you are the least troublesome person in that capacity he has ever met."

"I understand; but he shall find the contrary this evening."

"Too late; the affair is settled, and will be publicly announced in a day or two."

As they walked towards the house, Madame de Bellegarde turned abruptly to Klemmhein, and asked him if he had known that his friends were on the island.

"No; on my honour," he answered, eagerly.

"They said you had betrayed them," she rejoined, with some asperity.

"I knew they were to dine with Adlerkron, as I too had been invited; I preferred going to you, and not seeing any trace of them when we arrived, concluded they had all left."

Madame de Bellegarde began to linger behind, and speak in the drawling indistinct manner which she always assumed when she did not choose to be understood by any one but the person immediately addressed. Melanie stopped, waited, made various innocent attempts to draw her into conversation—all in vain. Rupert, who had been talking to Cyrilla, at last interfered.

"Never mind her, Melanie," he said, half laughing. "You are only boring her and yourself to no purpose."

"I cannot imagine," observed Cyrilla, "what she finds so particularly attractive in M. de Klemmhein."

"He is good-humoured and gentleman-like," replied Rupert.

"But," said Cyrilla, "not by any means so amusing as M. de Bellegarde, who is also good-humoured, and certainly very indulgent; he allows Adrienne to do whatever she pleases."

"She would do that at all events."

"You seem to know her well."

"As well—better, perhaps, than if she were my sister. In the time of our greatest intimacy, she told me that going into society without having some *one* particular object of interest, was intolerably dull work after the first year, which, of course, was wholly devoted to dancing, and the satisfying of divers little personal vanities. She made me rather a convert to her opinion; and since then, and in consequence of later experience, I think the less married people live in what is called the world the better; that is, until they have grown-up sons and daughters."

"Indeed!"

“ I hope you are not alarmed at my opinion ? ”

“ N—o ; but I should like to know something of your experience.”

“ You think, perhaps, it has not been sufficiently extensive to warrant what I have just said,” replied Rupert, “ and you may be right. I confess having judged more from observation than actual experience.”

“ I was not thinking of that, and only want to know something about your ‘ particular objects of interest,’ ” said Cyrilla, smiling.

“ My first was Melanie,” began Rupert, gaily. “ After having adored her in the most poetical and deferential manner for more than a year, Adrienne chose to patronize me—much in the way she does Klemmhein now.”

“ That did not last long,” said Melanie, laughing.

“ No ; we had been too intimate as children, knew each other’s faults perfectly, and did nothing but quarrel and call each other ugly names.”

“ And then . . . ? ” said Cyrilla, archly.

“ Then . . . then . . . what did I do next, Melanie ? ”

“ I don’t know ; your ‘ objects of interest ’ have been too numerous for my memory ; but I think . . . I heard . . . something . . . about Virginie.”

Cyrilla saw his quick glance towards her sister, marked the rush of blood to his temples, and waited with some anxiety for his answer.

“ Virginie,” he repeated, with a slight degree of embarrassment ; “ Virginie might have turned a wiser head than mine, with her strong feelings and impassioned manner ; but years of unreserved intimacy blunted my perceptions, I suppose, for I never got beyond the regard befitting a friendship that had commenced time out of mind.”

Cyrilla drew a long breath.

“ Taking her all in all,” continued Rupert, with some warmth, “ she is by many degrees the best of the family. Julie is, and always was, an audacious coquette ; and as to Adrienne . . . ” here he stopped and looked down the avenue, at the end of which Madame de Bellegarde was still loitering, affectedly playing with her parasol, while

Klemmhein partly carried, partly trailed after him, her long many-coloured Indian shawl. "Is it not provoking to see her acting so foolishly, exposing herself so continually to ridicule and contempt? You have no idea of the manner in which the Bellegardes and Lindesmars are spoken of in Exfort."

"After all," said Melanie, "it is hard that a woman should lose her reputation in consequence of conclusions unkindly drawn from mere appearances. The very pardonable wish to enjoy the society of an agreeable man, or at worst the yielding to an impulse of vanity, is often denominated crime by the censorious world; and I am convinced that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, nothing of the kind has been intended, or even thought of . . . by our sex at least."

"I am sorry I cannot give you the same assurance for mine," said Rupert, laughing; "and therefore it is better that women should enjoy the society of agreeable men with a degree of moderation which may defy the censure of the world. You have always done so, and no one can doubt that your temptations to act otherwise have been much greater than Adrienne de Bellegarde's."

"For me there was no temptation, no danger," said Melanie, pensively; "the memory of Englmann ever hovered round me like a guardian angel—my *ideal* was too exalted for any other even momentarily to approach it . . . Edouard alone at one time . . . but no, his was but the outward form of the perfection I sought . . . Great was my reliance on him—bitter my disappointment!"

"His conduct to Cyrilla naturally shocked you," said Rupert, his eyes fixed intently on the ground while he spoke; "*it was* dishonourable, *it is* ungenerous and selfish beyond measure. Cyrilla has exacted a promise of neutrality from me, that is perhaps the hardest trial to which I could have been subjected; but a month hence I hope for some explanation, and in the meantime, Melanie, you who know the nature of our present engagement . . ."

"It is no engagement," cried Cyrilla, interrupting him quickly; "I am not yet at liberty to make one."

"I consider it an engagement, on my part at least, for the next four months," rejoined Rupert; "and I was about to request Melanie to bear it in mind, and use the influence which she possesses with Zorndorff to our advantage."

"My efforts hitherto have been unsuccessful," said Melanie; "but Cyrilla can tell you how unceasing they have been. If the assurance of my best wishes be of any value, believe me that no one more sincerely desires the removal of all impediments to your marriage,—no one would more rejoice in your union with Cyrilla than I should do."

"Dear Melanie," cried Rupert, eagerly; "that is the most intelligible and kindest speech you have ever made me;" and, taking her hand in both his, he thanked her with a fervour so unusual, that it attracted the attention of Julie and some others, who were standing on the lawn. Their laughter made Melanie look up, and the first person on whom her eyes rested was Zorndorff. His unexpected re-appearance caused her to start; his inquiring gaze seemed a sort of warning to her omen-seeking disposition; she snatched her hand from her cousin's, and whispering hurriedly, "Don't thank me for mere good wishes—I cannot be of any real service to you," walked into the tent.

Rupert turned to speak to Cyrilla; but she had disappeared altogether, and it was not until an hour afterwards he discovered her alone in the music-room. It was so dark that he could not distinguish her features; but she continued to sing at his request, though a slight tremor in her voice, betraying past or present emotion, was soon so dissonant to his joyous temperament, that he stopped her by saying, "Come, dear Cyrilla, I perceive that singing is an exertion to you to-night, let us join the merry party on the lawn, and banish all our cares for the rest of the evening."

As they passed through the large drawing-room, a dark figure rose from one of the chairs, and moved stealthily into another room.

"Who is it?" whispered Cyrilla.

"Zorndorff, I am almost sure."

"And he has been sitting here listening, while I have

been singing that song, and . . . Oh, what will he think of me!"

"What song? What do you mean?"

"Theckla's song . . . and it brought to my mind the evening I had sung it for you long ago, and all that has since occurred, and I have been crying and making a fool of myself, and he will totally misunderstand me."

"I remember that evening," said Rupert, thoughtfully; "it was just before our *déjeuner dansant*; but I am surprised to find you encouraging reminiscences which are both painful and useless; it is seeking sorrow so unnecessarily."

"Very true," replied Cyrilla; "and misfortune and sorrow, as Melanie says, seem already to have claimed me for their own."

"That was a more poetical than wise speech of hers," said Rupert.

"Perhaps so, but there are times when I feel a presentiment of grief to come, a fear of impending evil . . . a . . ."

"O, my dear Cyrilla," cried Rupert, interrupting her; "I greatly fear that Melanie is depriving your youth of all its happiness—with all her excellence she is just the most dangerous companion possible for you."

"But she is so kind and good," said Cyrilla, "and always means so well. Nothing could be more disinterested than her advice to me has been; in fact, she risked her own domestic happiness in the vain hope to secure mine!"

"That is," said Rupert, "she played at lottery with both, and promoted neither. Do not think me unkind if I enlighten you a little with respect to her faults or weaknesses, and point out to you that her words and actions are continually at variance. While declaring that love was beyond all price—the greatest of earthly blessings—she married the President, for whom she did not feel a particle of regard, married him because he possessed rank and riches, and deserted . . . one of the best fellows that ever lived—a man with 'eyes of deep serenity'—such as she so perpetually describes in her verses!"

“She has told me all that,” said Cyrilla, “and says that her life has since been one prolonged regret!”

“Nonsense!” cried Rupert, impatiently; “she would act in the same way if put to the proof to-morrow. Now, understand me: I don’t blame her for marrying Falkenstein; but I blame her for not trying to see his good qualities, for not endeavouring to obtain his confidence, for not being grateful for his tacit indulgence of all her fancies, his forbearance with habits so diametrically opposed to his own but I believe it is necessary to a perfect state of sentimental existence to have a grand secret sorrow, and she finds the President, with his gray hair and unpoetical expanse of waistcoat, a fit object to inspire eternal regrets You may imagine how real they are, when you hear her talk with disgust of the world and its vanities, and yet live in a constant round of dissipation.”

“Dear Rupert, she cannot help herself; her position is”

“Her position is a very common one,” said Rupert; “she talks in one way, and acts in another, expatiates on the delights of a country life, but declines visiting her husband’s estate”

“She told me,” interposed Cyrilla, “that it was in an odiously uninteresting country.”

“All the same,” cried Rupert. “Have I not heard her talk of frugality while eating green peas at Christmas!”

Cyrilla laughed, and so did Rupert; but he added, while they walked towards the tent together, “It is therefore evident, that many people’s, and especially Melanie’s, theory and practice widely differ; her advice has not hitherto been of advantage to you—avoid following it in future.”

Zorndorff did not appear at supper: some one said he had been seen going towards the lake.





CHAPTER XXXII.

RUPERT'S efforts to induce the President to remove to Freilands before the month of June, although warmly seconded by both Cyrilla and Melanie, were vain. The disappointment was great; but he soon resigned himself to what he laughingly called "a little fit of obstinacy, which he had not expected from so wise a man," deferred asking for leave of absence, and attended to the duties of his regiment.

The Viscountess de Rubigny had returned to her family in an unobtrusive, some said a mysterious, manner; that is, one fine evening, at a late hour, she had made her appearance at the Bellegardes, accompanied by an Italian maid who could speak no German, and a sickly-looking, black-eyed boy of about two years old, who lisped very imperfectly in French. Now, although the inhabitants of the best houses in Exfort had been duly informed that M. de Rubigny had been mortally wounded by a masked figure during the carnival, and though his relations had worn mourning the usual length of time afterwards, still, no sooner was Virginie's arrival made known, and it had been ascertained that neither she nor her family were disposed to give satisfactory reasons for her choosing to reside in Germany instead of with her father-in-law in France, than the people of Exfort thought it necessary to give very unsatisfactory ones. De Rubigny had had reason to be jealous of a certain Marquis who should be nameless, and had written to his father, requesting him to

promote his removal to some other part of Italy. Before the necessary arrangements had been completed, the unfortunate young man had been murdered by . . . they would not say who! Or . . . no . . . it was Virginie who had been jealous, whether with or without cause was unknown . . . that her husband frequented various gaming-tables became notorious . . . she had employed some one to watch him . . . he had been irritated . . . a quarrel, scuffle, murder had been the consequence . . . his father was inconsolable, refused to see her, &c. &c. &c. It was also rumoured that servants had overheard M. de Bellegarde speak loudly of expensive habits and debts innumerable, while Madame had been equally loquacious about a brute of a father-in-law and a heartless old grand-papa. Madame de Rubigny herself seemed little disposed to be communicative. She was more silent than ever, and devoted herself altogether to her child. When the physician thought the air of the town disagreed with him, she removed without hesitation to a small lodging at a gardener's in one of the suburbs, and her family extolled her conduct in all the superlatives of the French language. "Virginie, with her luxurious habits, living in two little, wretched rooms, without a carpet! her toilet-table the top of a chest of painted drawers!! dressing her child with her own hands, and spending hours with him in the garden!!! It was admirable—affecting—sublime!"

And they visited her daily, and found the hours, spent in a large arbour at the end of a well-cultivated kitchen-garden, by no means dull, for there was a fort in the neighbourhood of her humble dwelling, and the officers who were not on guard visited those who were, and then they turned into the garden to inquire for poor, dear, little Alphonse! And Rupert invariably stopped there on his way to Freilands; and it was remarked by the gardener's wife that his visits became longer and longer, and that his groom grumbled very much sometimes at his master's apparent forgetfulness of him and his horses.

The gardener's garden became for a time extremely fashionable. No servants were admitted; the company

chose to attend upon themselves, or rather on each other ; and the poor stupid gardener's wife had at least sense enough to boil water for tea, and supply them with brown bread and butter ! This playing at poverty in kid gloves and satin boots was charming ; Virginie's grace, as she presided at her rustic table, inimitable ; her distribution of weak tea, in cracked delft cups, bewitching ! A sort of comedy was being continually performed in which Rupert most unconsciously began to play a prominent part ; while even those who might be supposed to belong to the audience could not always resist the temptation to assist at the little scenes daily enacted in the arbour and its vicinity.

Fond of children in an unusual degree, Rupert's principal employment seemed at first to be carrying little Alphonse about the garden, or chasing butterflies for him among the cabbage-plants, or mending broken toys ; for, as yet, those "real blessings to mothers," the indestructible toys made of vulcanized India rubber, were still unknown. But in all these occupations he contrived in some way to interest Cyrilla, though she had latterly become extremely guarded in both words and manner, apparently quite as much dreading Virginie's quiet scrutinizing glances as Zorndorff's steady gaze. The latter had seldom time to lounge away an afternoon with them. When he did so, he was received with acclamation, and treated as an honoured guest. Julie overwhelmed him with attentions, which he received with ironical condescension ; while his nervous wife, fastening on Cyrilla, followed her from place to place, whispering soft reproaches for supposed neglect, and assurances that she had followed her advice and had got some new books, and had begun quite a large piece of tapestry work, and that all her physicians said if she continued for a few months as tranquil as at present, they could promise her years of health and happiness ! Cyrilla smiled, and encouraged her in her good resolutions ; at the same time, however, carefully withdrew from every attempted approach towards intimacy ; and though they spoke to each other with apparently the same familiarity

as the others, Margaret felt and Zorndorff saw that Cyrilla did so merely to avoid singularity. But while his wife deplored what she supposed an unconquerable personal dislike, he triumphed in the idea that jealousy made Cyrilla shrink from the society of her rival. Forgetful that in her eyes he had for nearly three years appeared in the light of a criminal alike callous and tyrannical—unconscious that every particle of esteem and affection for him had in consequence become extinct—incapable himself of trust so implicit as Rupert's—he never even suspected the conditional engagement between the cousins; and therefore, with the exception of occasional moments of jealousy, he had never ceased to flatter himself that her heart was as entirely his own as it had ever been. Many trifling occurrences, and Cyrilla's own manner, served to confirm this error; for all her self-possession had not prevented so close and anxious an observer from remarking a sudden paleness when he appeared, an ill-concealed trepidation whenever he approached her; and when at length with secret exultation he perceived her first timid efforts towards conciliation—her half reluctant attempts to speak to him, he suffered much in following the plan he had resolved to adopt. But he did so; and, resolutely avoiding her advances, pretended to listen with interest to the lively gossip of Julie de Lindesmar, who, the moment his wife left his side, invariably took her place—observing, with charming *naïveté*, that the contrast of companions would be good for his health and spirits.

Tired of this manœuvring, Cyrilla had one day seized on an unguarded moment, and hastily, perhaps a little imperiously, demanded the interview he had promised her—but—when the next day she went to his house, according to appointment, and entered the library, she found Margaret lying on the sofa and quite prepared to receive her, while Zorndorff, after a cold inclination of his head, continued writing as if no one had been present. Bitter tears of indignation she shed during her walk home with Melanie. Many were her resolutions never again to speak to him; but the thought of being obliged to resign Rupert

for ever was so painful, that by degrees she was induced to listen patiently to the diffident extenuation of his conduct offered by her sister, and even to hope again despite of experience.

About this time a large circular wooden edifice began to be erected not far from Virginie's residence ; in other words, just outside the town. It was a circus for a troop of equestrian performers, who, having fulfilled their engagements, or quarrelled with the directors of the Cirque de Paris, or Astley's in London, had now resolved to perform on their own account at the principal (and principally garrison) towns of Germany. Let it not be supposed that their wandering propensities, or the fact of their performances taking place in a booth, necessarily proved that they were of a worthless or even inferior description. The beautiful and graceful Léjar has sprung through the usual number of papered hoops and garlands, and over astonishing rows of tricolor bands, before the admiring eyes of royalty itself in such a place ; and her black-bearded husband has hung on the flank of his flying courser, or driven his nine horses with the same unerring dexterity there as at Franconi's !

The troop in question were not quite so distinguished, but there were several very good riders, vaulters, and jugglers among them ; also a little girl who performed wonderful leaps ; a very handsome woman ; horses, mules, and ponies of all descriptions ; a "*Monsieur* clown," who spoke very broken German ; and a *Hans Wurst*, who was very rough, and dealt out blows and handfuls of sawdust in a manner likely to produce bursts of applause from the last tier of benches.

That the building of the circus, and the arrival of horses, hoops, garlands, bands, and bigas, should cause considerable interest in Exfort, will not surprise any one who has ever spent any time in a provincial town ; and when at length the prima donna arrived, the interesting event was naturally discussed in every family, and with peculiar zest at the assembly which, not long afterwards, took place at the gardener's.

“Did you see her, too?” asked Madame de Bellegarde, turning with her usual vivacity to her husband the moment he entered the garden.

“Yes; but at a respectful distance—she was sitting in rather a pensive attitude on a wooden bandbox in the middle of the street!”

“Is she so very handsome?”

“Don’t know,—Klemmhein was nearer, and he says she had deuced dirty gloves on, and was somewhat swarthy of countenance.”

“She’s an Italian,” said Klemmhein, “but there’s Adlerkron; why have you not asked him? He talked to her for nearly an hour, and has already taken the largest box in the circus for the whole time she remains here. Her complexion evidently did not displease him; and he is no bad judge of such things.”

Virginie’s eyes slowly moved in the direction indicated; and a scarcely perceptible flush passed over her sallow cheek as Cyrilla unhesitatingly said, “Come, Rupert, tell us all about her; is she handsome?”

“She has magnificent eyes, and raven black hair,” he answered, smiling; “and you know I consider black hair a positive beauty in itself.”

“Without exactly meaning to dispute your taste, Adlerkron,” said Klemmhein, “I must say that fair-haired women have something infinitely more angelic-looking than dark-haired.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Rupert; “for,” he added, turning to Cyrilla with a meaning glance, “if I wanted an angel’s head for a church, I should certainly prefer yours to Melanie’s, though she is undoubtedly a great deal handsomer than you are!”

“My only consolation,” said Cyrilla, looking up demurely, “is, that artists, who are supposed to have studied beauty more than other people, almost always give the preference to fair hair. The predilection is made evident in a most satisfactory manner in all the pictures of the Day of Judgment I have ever seen.”

“That is true,” said Virginie; “it is quite provoking to

see all the fair-haired women going upwards, and all the dark-haired ones going to . . . to . . .”

“Out with it, Virginie,” cried Rupert, laughing; “we are only talking of pictures, you know.”

Virginie stooped down rather unnecessarily to arrange her little boy's blouze, which had been pulled somewhat awry by a tiny sword that Rupert had just taken an infinity of trouble to fasten in a manner calculated to make as much noise as possible whenever he moved. The child struggled, freed himself from his mother's hands, walked a few steps, looked uneasily over his shoulder; and not hearing the clinking noise he expected, ran to Rupert, and, after a short pantomime of childish despair, began to scream with all his might.

“What lungs the little animal has!” observed M. de Bellegarde. “You need not be anxious about the state of his chest, Virginie. Bravo, bravo . . . encore . . . encore!”

Virginie, who seemed to understand more in her brother-in-law's speech than “met the ear,” first tried to pacify, and then prepared to carry off her child; but Rupert held the little bawler fast, and whispered, “Mamma knows nothing about swords, Alphonse . . . but it's not broken, and see . . . if you don't make noise enough directly to astonish us all!”

“He has done that already,” said M. de Bellegarde.

“Off with you, my little warrior,” cried Rupert, after having satisfactorily completed the work of untidiness; and the boy strutted forward towards the part of the garden appropriated to cabbages, trailing his tin appendage after him with evident satisfaction, and looking from side to side as if the plants had been an admiring multitude.

“One might moralize on that baby's thoughts and actions . . .” began Melanie.

“Pray, don't,” cried Rupert, laughing; “for I can imagine your drawing a very little flattering comparison between some large things wearing swords and that small thing there!”

Melanie smiled. “I should certainly have chosen other words; but at least you have made it evident to me that

others as well as myself make mental comparisons of that kind. I never see children playing, without the thought suggesting itself . . . Are not we like children in the eyes of a higher order of beings? Do they feel the kind yet somewhat contemptuous compassion that we experience on witnessing the follies or foibles of infants?"

"Zorndorff, come nearer," said Rupert, rising; "Melanie is getting into the world of spirits, and you can follow her there better than I can."

"Rather let us draw her back to us," said Zorndorff; "for, without descending to children's plays, or ascending to superior beings, we ourselves can find daily opportunities of feeling the contemptuous compassion of which she speaks."

"Not I," cried Rupert; "I do not even experience it for that little urchin there: on the contrary, I can quite enter into his feelings, participate in them, in fact . . . it is but a very few years since I, too, trailed my sabre,—the only difference between us worth mentioning being, that I did not do it for . . . cabbage-plants."

"You do yourself injustice," observed Virginie; "I never saw any one so totally devoid of vanity—so free from such follies, as you have ever been."

"And yet I trailed my sabre," rejoined Rupert, pertinaciously. "Virginie, you know I did."

"If," observed Zorndorff, with a scarcely perceptible glance towards Cyrilla, "if any one knows the when, why, and where you did so, it must be Madame de Rubigny."

"Of course," answered Rupert. "She knows as much about me as any one can—our acquaintance began when I was but little older than Alphonse."

"And friendships begun so early," observed Virginie, with a certain degree of pathos, "become a part of our being, and seldom end but with life!"

"Let us take a lease of ours for that period," said Rupert, with a good-humoured smile, as he sauntered towards a table in the arbour, where, finding a large yellow paper printed in placard type, he held it up, and began to read aloud:—" 'Cirque de Paris; ' 'Jeux Olympiques;'

‘Pas de Deux;’ ‘Pegasus;’ ‘Madame Amina Vinci, &c. &c.’ Who will honour the Circus with their presence, and who will not? I have places in my box for Melanie, Cyrilla, and Virginie.”

“I am afraid,” said Virginie, with some hesitation, “I cannot . . . ought not to go.”

“Why not?”

“I have still a sort of mourning . . .”

“Which you may lay aside whenever you please, I suppose. I wish these black things were gone,” he added, touching some lace which formed a rather fantastic but very becoming head-dress.

“You don’t like black lace?”

“I don’t know. I am not learned in such matters; but I would rather see your beautiful hair than any lace in Christendom.”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Virginie removed the offending coiffure, but also with it the comb that fastened the beautiful hair so unreservedly admired.

Her brother-in-law . . . Oh, why are brothers-in-law sometimes so clear-sighted or so facetious? Is it, that they have nothing at stake, and care not whether they mar or make? . . . M. de Bellegarde laughed, and exclaimed, “Well done, Virginie . . . extremely natural . . . never saw any one whose hair falls so often or so appropriately as yours!—but indeed the temptation was strong, after such a speech as Adlerkron’s.”

“My hair falls often . . . but I cannot help it,” said Virginie, slowly and not very adroitly rolling it round the back of her head. “Alphonse’s Bonne unfortunately cannot dress hair, and I cannot afford to keep a maid for myself until,” she added in a low voice, as she took her comb out of Rupert’s hands “until I have paid all—all my debts.”

“Dearest Virginie,” cried Madame de Bellegarde, approaching her, “it is very naughty of Henri to taunt you in this manner, especially when he knows as well as I do the admirable motives which . . .”

“O, yes—I understand her admirable motives perfectly,” said M. de Bellegarde, nodding sagaciously.

While Virginie bestowed a furtive glance of intense anger on her brother-in-law, Zorndorff smiled oddly, and looked from Cyrilla to Rupert. The latter was apparently interested in some lines which he was making with his spur on the gravel-walk, and he continued his occupation as he said, "I suppose, Cyrilla, I may reckon on you and Melanie to-night?"

"O, certainly,—I wish of all things to see your black-haired beauty."

"I flatter myself," he said, looking up with a smile,—“I flatter myself that you will be agreeably surprised—she is just the sort of woman to look splendid by lamp-light!"

When Virginie's visitors left the garden, she detained Madame de Bellegarde, and said, with great irritation of manner, "That it was impossible any longer to endure Henri's insults, and if her sister could not in future come without him, she would rather not see her at all!"

"My dear creature, you know he always talks in that wild way—he says the same sort of things to me continually. Only fancy his telling M. de Klemmheim the other day, when we dined at Freilands, that I could drink more champagne than any woman of his acquaintance, and that one could tell the number of glasses I had had by the twinkle of my eye! Did you ever hear anything so vulgar? and then he laughed and joked about it, until M. de Klemmheim quite blushed for him. I am sure that was a great deal worse than merely observing that your hair tumbled down rather often."

"O, it was not exactly that I meant . . . it was what he said last . . . a . . . a . . . sort of reference to things long past."

"Or," said Madame de Bellegarde, "or things to come, perhaps?"

"Do you think Rupert understood or suspected . . ." began Virginie.

"I don't know," said Madame de Bellegarde. "He is too gentlemanlike to exhibit a shade of consciousness on such an occasion; he did not even appear to hear."

"I did not venture to look at him," said Virginie; "for

you know, Adrienne, that the slightest hint of a wish to attract him would be sufficient to put him on his guard. I never refer to the past when it is possible to avoid it; for, were he once to imagine”

“Never mind what he imagines—he is still free, it seems, and you are again so; therefore, to prevent further annoyance, I shall enlighten Henri to-night when we are alone. He is not such a fool as to interfere when there is the slightest chance of your success; so you have nothing to fear from his jests in future as far as Rupert is concerned.”

“But you need not be *too* explicit, Adrienne.”

“Of course not. I have only to tell him that Rupert certainly *was* attached to you some years ago; and if it had not been for mamma’s awkward manœuvring, of which some busy-body informed his uncle Gottfried, there was every chance of a and all that sort of thing eh?”

“Exactly—I—wish—I were quite certain that his fancy for Cyrilla were over.”

“You never were quite certain that it existed. Did you not tell me yourself that you could not get her to confess anything?”

“That is true. Nevertheless, I suspect she refused him, in order to be at liberty to accept Count Zorndörff, who certainly was attached to her at that time, and evidently is so still more than is advisable, though Julie actually has the folly to imagine he prefers her because she is such a contrast to his wife.”

Madame de Bellegarde shrugged her shoulders, and began to walk towards the garden-gate.

“If,” continued Virginie, “if Margaret should die, as every one says she will a few months hence, Count Zorndörff will assuredly offer himself to Cyrilla as soon as he can do so with propriety. I wish I were equally sure she would accept him.”

“Poor Victor!” said Madame de Bellegarde, laughing, “I suppose he has no chance whatever?”

“Not the least,” answered Virginie. “Cyrilla is quite unconscious of his admiration; but even were it otherwise,

I do not think that grandpapa would consent for some years at least, and that would be of no use to *me*. I wish with all my heart she were married . . . to any one excepting Rupert . . . He quite provoked me just now by calling her baby face angelic—an angel's head for a church, with wings under the ears, I suppose! I felt the greatest inclination to propose that she should in future carry a trumpet about with her, and favour her admirers with a few blasts occasionally, to complete the resemblance!"

"It is very well you were silent. Such a speech would have betrayed a world of jealousy."

"And I am jealous . . . oh, Adrienne, I am horribly jealous," cried Virginie, vehemently.

"Now, pray don't take the affair *au sérieux*," cried Madame de Bellegarde, laughing; "it would be too ridiculous! Rupert is an excellent *parti* no doubt, but it is absolutely necessary for you now to keep your pecuniary difficulties in your mind, and to marry the first man of good fortune who asks you. Whether he be named Rupert or Moritz is not of much importance. This *entre nous*, of course."

"And do you think me as heartless as Julie?" cried Virginie, catching her sister's arm. "Do you imagine that I can change the object of my affection every six months as she does? I tell you no; I would rather beg my bread than marry again, if it be not Rupert!"

"I declare you are quite violent," said Madame de Bellegarde, shrinking a little.

"You cannot understand me," said Virginie, with a look and tone of contempt. "What do you know of such feelings?"

"Gracious, Virginie! how you talk . . . just as if I had neither heart nor feelings!"

"O yes, you have both . . . such as they are!"

"Well, I am sure it is better so than such as yours," cried Madame de Bellegarde, angrily. "I at least never reversed the order of things, and offered love instead of accepting it;" but the words had scarcely escaped her lips before she repented them. "Pardon me, Virginie," she

said, turning beseechingly to her sister, who stood pale and rigid as a statue beside her,—“ Pardon me: I did not consider what I was saying.”

“ Make no apologies,” answered Virginie, with a tragic air. “ I believe you knew not the torture you inflicted: only those who have themselves felt . . . are merciful. Scoff on! Why should I care? Why not rather glory in loving the most excellent of human beings?”

“ Nonsense!” cried Madame de Bellegarde, drawing her shawl round her with an impatient sweep, as if she thought it time to end their conversation. “ Don’t talk to me in this way. Rupert is a dear good soul, generous as a prince, and honourable as a knight of romance; but it was his fortune and not himself that attracted you, and still more mamma, a few years ago.”

“ I deny that, as far as I am concerned,” said Virginie.

“ You surprise me; for, after all, he is not the sort of man to make a woman forget the world and everything for him.”

“ More so,” rejoined Virginie, “ than your *present* adorer, M. de Klemmhein, I should think.”

“ By no means,” said Madame de Bellegarde, without the slightest embarrassment or irritation. “ Klemmhein has the incalculable advantage of being perfectly devoted, whereas Rupert’s attention is bestowed on such a variety of things, that he will never have time to be more than politely kind or good-naturedly civil to any woman.”

“ Very odd that he should have found so many willing to receive his good-natured civility!” observed Virginie, ironically.

“ His position makes him desirable,” said Madame de Bellegarde; “ and I am sorry to perceive it is merely a secondary consideration with you. Vanity is not his weakness; and attentions, whether feigned or real, will make little impression on him, I fear.”

“ You are right,” said Virginie; “ but if *I* have had a lesson, so has he. Cyrilla has made him feel what it is to be slighted. I told him it would be so three years ago at Freilands, and he is changed (perhaps in consequence) for

the better . . . is more serious and steady than he used to be, and . . . once quite sure that her influence were at an end, I should have no reason to despair."

"There is no engagement, at all events," said Madame de Bellegarde, "and that ought to satisfy you ; but now I really must go home, for Henri can pardon anything rather than being kept waiting for dinner."





CHAPTER XXXIII.



OME days of rain were succeeded by beautiful spring weather, and again the Bellegarde coterie, with the exception of Rupert, began to assemble daily at the gardener's. Little Alphonse's stammering inquiries for "Upert" were at first answered satisfactorily enough by Klemmhein, who said either that he was on guard at one of the forts, or he had gone to Freilands with some famous man, who was about to drain the great marsh, turn the bogs into corn-fields, and spoil the best shooting in the whole country; but, at a later period, when Virginie heard him explaining to her child that Rupert was in the Circus, "looking at a pretty lady riding," and the same answer was repeated day after day, she began to feel very dissatisfied; and once, when Zorndorff was present, betrayed her annoyance, or, as she herself called it, her curiosity, so unequivocally, that all he had ever heard or surmised about her and Rupert some years before recurred to his memory; and while still pondering on the probable consequences of plans which he imagined more deeply laid than was the case, Melanie and Cyrilla entered the garden. An irresistible inclination to test the latter on the same subject prompted him to continue the conversation with Klemmhein.

"You don't mean to say that Adlerkron is all day and every day in that circus?"

"Not all day, for he only remains while Madame Vinci rides. I believe he is taking lessons from her."

“Oh!”

“If,” cried Madame de Bellegarde, laughing, “if the best rider in your regiment thinks it necessary to receive instruction from *la bella Amina*, I suppose you will all follow his example?”

“I shall not,” answered Klemmhein; “she is too expensive for me,”

“Expensive!” repeated Virginie. “Does she really give lessons?”

“Adlerkron is getting one just now,” he replied. “As I looked into the circus for a moment, on my way here, I saw him walking beside her, and listening to explanations of the different signs made with her bridle, whip, knee, and foot. She certainly is the best female equestrian I ever saw, and is at present training a horse, for which, they say, Adlerkron is to pay an unmentionable sum of money.”

“I suppose,” said Virginie, “it is in that way the lessons are remunerated?”

“Not altogether . . . there is no sort of unnecessary prudery about her; and her husband does not make the least objection to her receiving presents, whether bouquets or bracelets.”

“You don’t mean to say,” cried Virginie, quickly, “that Rupert gives her such things?”

“I have seen her nearly buried under the bouquets from Freilands,” answered Klemmhein, hurried into hyperbole by a love of banter. “Trinkets are showered upon her, and no later than this morning she received the very handsomest bracelet that could be procured in Exfort.”

“Have you heard of these doings?” asked Virginie, in a low voice, turning to Cyrilla.

“Of some of them certainly,” she answered, with a look of quiet amusement; “for I was obliged to choose a bracelet for her yesterday.”

“It would be better,” said Virginie, “if you used the privileges of your near relationship to point out to Rupert the—the impropriety . . .”

“But there is none whatever. If it amuses him to learn

how a woman can perfectly manage a horse, notwithstanding all the difficulties of her awkward position, why should he not?"

"Why not?" interposed Klemmhein, with affected gravity. "And why should he not practise putting her on and taking her off her horse, as I saw him do to-day at least a dozen times consecutively?"

Cyrilla laughed, and continued: "I too was present one morning with Melanie, and liked looking on of all things; but Rupert said there were too many men there . . . and . . . he did not wish us to go again."

"I dare say not," observed Zorndorff.

"I must acknowledge," said Virginie, "that I feel a good deal of . . . curiosity to see this wonderful woman."

"Go with Melanie to the circus to-night," suggested Cyrilla—"I believe you are the only person in Exfort who has not seen her; and I think I may assure you that you will be surprised and pleased. Madame Vinci is the queen of equestrians, and will to-night play Queen of the Amazons."

"Is she then so very remarkably handsome?"

"Rupert says so," replied Cyrilla, nodding her head with an arch smile; "and there he is now at the garden-gate."

"Upert! Upert!" cried little Alphonse, rushing down the gravel walk and shouting with delight, as he felt himself raised six or seven feet high in the air by his tall friend.

Virginie followed, and seemed to be making some reproaches, to which Rupert did not apparently pay much attention.

"How delightfully naive she is in the demonstration of her regard," observed Zorndorff to Margaret, who was standing beside Cyrilla.

"Who? Virginie?"

"Yes. Is it possible you did not observe her jealousy about Madame Vinci?"

"Poor thing! What tyrants men are when they once discover their power over us! You ought to scold your

cousin," she added, turning to Cyrilla, "for his cruel neglect of Virginie during the last fortnight."

Cyrilla did not answer. Zorndorff imagined he detected uneasiness in her quick glance towards the gate.

"Such perseverance and constancy deserve to be rewarded," he continued; "and Adlerkron cannot be so inhuman as to hold out much longer."

Just then Rupert advanced and extended towards Cyrilla an enormous bouquet of the choicest hot-house plants. She was accustomed to receive flowers from him, and had never thought it necessary to express much gratitude either for them or for any of the attentions he habitually bestowed on her; but his fragrant gift and beaming smile were, at that moment, more than welcome. They dispelled the first scarcely defined cloud of jealousy that had ever threatened to darken their intercourse. Her joyous step towards him was almost a bound, and, for more than a minute, she held the hand as well as the bouquet, while she eagerly explained to him that he must keep a place for her in his box at the circus, as Virginie had at last consented to go with Melanie to see Madame Vinci.

"O that's right . . . but I have not time to tell her how glad I am, as I must go on directly to Freilands. I wish Melanie and you would go with me—she could stay on the balcony while we went up the river together to see how my drainage is getting on. I never was so interested in anything in my life. The course of the river is being corrected, several canals cut, and there is every likelihood that my little colony of turf-cutters will become, in the course of time, rich farmers. I shall be able to do more for them when we . . . I mean to say when I, settle definitively at Freilands. There is something very pleasant in watching the gradually increasing prosperity of these poor people—one feels that one has not been altogether useless in the world."

"Dear Rupert, how good you are!" cried Virginie, who had approached them unawares.

"No, no," he replied, quickly; "you must not imagine

me better than I am. My motives are not altogether philanthropical. The interests of my colonists are mine in point of fact—the only difference being, that they feel the benefit of my outlay of capital sooner than I can; but I have been told, and have little doubt, that I shall reap considerable profit in the course of a few years.”

Virginie looked wistfully after them as they soon after drove away together, and became so thoughtful, that she scarcely perceived the coming and going of her other numerous visitors. An absence of all formality was perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of their little coterie; they came and went, spoke or were silent, exactly as they felt inclined, and no one took the least notice of her now as she sauntered up and down, apparently occupied with her child, while her thoughts were wandering uneasily from the circus to the marsh at Freilands.

“I’m going,” said Madame de Bellegarde, moving slowly along the gravel walk, trailing a handsome shawl after her in the most approved manner; “the garden is cold, and so is the tea, and M. de Klemmhein is getting dull. Where do we meet to-night after we leave the circus?” she asked, with difficulty suppressing a yawn; “for my part, I neither know the day of the month nor day of the week!”

“It is Wednesday,” answered M. de Klemmhein, “and is the Countess Falkenstein’s night.”

“I think I should like to go home too,” observed the Countess Zorndorff; “I cannot stay here any longer, the garden smells of a churchyard,” and she shuddered while speaking.

“Bless me, Margaret, what uncomfortable ideas you always have!” exclaimed Madame de Bellegarde; “I’m sure if this garden ever put me in mind of such a place, nothing would induce me to enter it again.”

“If it were not for the people I meet here, I don’t think I ever should,” said Margaret.

“We certainly must be very agreeable,” observed Julie, who had heard her remarks, having found it impossible to retain Zorndorff’s attention from the moment his wife had begun to speak; “we certainly must be very agreeable, to

induce the possessor of such a garden as yours to sit among the spinage and celery plants here."

"You are something more, something better than agreeable—you are healthy!" said Margaret, with a sigh.

"Why, yes—but—surely you will allow us to suppose you come here chiefly for our society?"

"My health compels me to seek association with the young, the strong, and the healthy—my very existence almost, depends on the emanations from the nerves of others."

"Are you taking anything from me or my nerves now?" asked Madame de Bellegarde, with pretended alarm.

Zorndorff rose, drew his wife's arm within his, and led her out of the garden. Contrary to his usual custom, however, he returned immediately, and Madame de Bellegarde, half expecting some severe speech, hurried past him. It was unnecessary: he was not thinking of her or of Julie either, though the latter stopped him to hope he had not been offended at Adrienne's jesting question. He assured her it was the damp air alone which had induced him to hurry Margaret's departure; and then he walked on, and she saw him approach her sister Virginie, and speak a few, a very few words. The answer was a look of surprise and a slight inclination of the head. Her curiosity was excited; it would have been more so had she seen them afterwards for more than an hour walking up and down the solitary garden in earnest conversation.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE evening as usual brought the friends together again; they poured into adjacent boxes at the circus, and greeted each other with familiar nods, smiles, and that peculiar manner of shaking one of the hands in the air so common in Germany. Though surrounded by hundreds of human beings greatly resembling them in dress and manner, they felt the proud consciousness of being an order quite apart, the observed of all observers. Were they not the haute volée, the crème de la crème of Exfort? Was it not a peculiar and much sought privilege to belong to them? Were there not scores of weak-minded cravers of fashion, who waited patiently, anxiously, for a sign of recognition, trying to deceive each other and themselves by speaking familiarly of the Falkensteins, Adlerkrons, Bellegardes, and others, as if they were their most intimate acquaintances? And, O ye Falkensteins, Adlerkrons, Bellegardes, and others, how often have your faults and follies been the jest of those too often disappointed of the expected bow, or casual sentence! Careless of the annoyance they caused, or rejoicing in their power, as the case may have been, they talked to each other as eagerly as if they had not met for a week; and when they did look round them, it was generally towards the upper benches, occupied by those whose names and faces were alike unknown to them, that their eyes wandered.

As to Rupert, he deserved to be sent to Coventry for standing up and talking in such an unreserved manner to

all the people behind him. How different was Zorndorff! with what supreme indifference he leaned back in his chair, scarcely deigning to bestow a look even on those who composed the outer ring of his own circle of acquaintance! How well he understood Julie's freedom of speech! How intensely satirical he could be!

Among the hundreds assembled in that brightly lighted circus to admire the gay dresses, handsome horses, and graceful riders, there were other coteries, no doubt. Perhaps, too, there may have been a kind-hearted young man in some of those middle benches, who, careless of the imaginary boundaries of rank, spoke willingly to those who seemed to wish it, even if they happened to be in that place where superior height denotes inferior rank or riches,—there may have been an humble imitator of Zorndorff too, with head half averted from the arena, superciliously inattentive to the performances, and confining his glances to a fair girl in a white robe, frowning when she smiled, or eagerly watching for the shade of melancholy that so often passed over her delicate features. There may have been subject for many an interesting volume in the history of some of those groups, but—we know it not. In vain we scan the row of faces, remark every peculiarity of form—to us it is like the pages of a book in an unknown language: we see distinctly every letter, we can even distinguish the words, but they convey no meaning to the mind. Are we annoyed at our ignorance? Do we regret the limited number of our acquaintance? No; on the present occasion decidedly not. We, that is to say the reader and writer of these pages, belong to the haute volée of Exfort, if an intimate acquaintance with some of its most distinguished members can give any right to the title; we are therefore exclusive—so completely so, that for us there is no one in that wooden rotundo but our friends, our acquaintances; and to them then let us turn our undivided attention, the more so as at this moment the Vinci is about to make her appearance.

A moment, and she appeared—a moment, and she was wildly galloping round the arena. To those who had ex-

pected to see her raised to the saddle, thence to spring through hoops or bound over scarfs,—the effect of her sweeping past them with all the ease and security of a man was startling. She was on the ground, mounted again, stretched at full length on the horse's back, or kneeling to take aim at an imaginary foe, while her faultless form seemed of itself to fall into the most graceful and nervous attitudes. The innumerable folds of the transparent drapey that floated round her was of such amplitude, that a part of it ever closely followed her rashest movements. A flesh-coloured tricot covered, but in no respect concealed, the upper part of her figure; the sparkling helmet of green and gold, of antique form, softened while it heightened the regularity of her strongly marked features, and the light javelin that quivered in her hand gave endless opportunities of exhibiting an arm of perfect symmetry. At length she stopped or rather walked her horse, while different barriers were being arranged, over which she and her impatient steed were to spring; her large black eyes wandered boldly and haughtily along the tiers of spectators; but as she passed Rupert, the expression changed—she glanced furtively at him, then at Cyrilla, half smiled, lowered her javelin in salute, and then darted forward again in full career.

The leaps were taken with unerring precision; and on the barriers being raised so as to allow her horse to pass beneath them, she sprang upright on his back, and cleared every impediment with an ease made manifest by her alighting alternately on her knees or feet. Thunders of applause shook the frail building; Rupert contributed to the noise with all his might—he clapped his hands, rattled his sabre, and muttered Italian words of approbation. On her appearing again to receive renewed plaudits, even Cyrilla's tiny right hand tapped quickly on the palm of the left; and at that moment Rupert bent towards her and whispered a few words: for a second she seemed to hesitate, but then gave him, with a scarcely perceptible reluctance, her beautiful and much valued bouquet, which he instantly flung at the feet of the fair Amazon. She raised

and pressed it to her heart, while bestowing on the donor the greater part of one of those flourishing obeisances peculiar to members of equestrian troops.

All this had been carefully noted by Zorndorff. His wavering jealousy seized eagerly the refutation offered by this trifling circumstance to some doubts inspired by Virginie during their private conversation some hours before, and he was completely confirmed in the persuasion, that whatever hopes or intentions Rupert might have entertained a few years before, they were now abandoned altogether, and from him, as a rival, he had nothing more to fear. He stooped forward to speak to Virginie, who, with a forced smile, was endeavouring to talk to his wife: "I hope, Madame de Rubigny, you saw that little pantomime? Will it not tend to confirm all I said to you to-day?"

"Had I been Cyrilla," said Virginie, "I should not have given him *my* flowers to throw to that . . . that woman!"

"I dare say not," observed Margaret, smiling: "I confess I was rather surprised, she seemed so exceedingly glad to get that very bouquet in your garden to-day! Did you not think so?"

"Yes; but Count Zorndorff said she liked the flowers merely for their colour and perfume, and that Rupert was a too near relation for her to value such little attentions on his part."

"I did not hear you say so," began Margaret, turning to Zorndorff; when did you say that?"

Virginie looked a little embarrassed.

"I remember," she continued, "your saying something about constancy and perseverance, and that Baron Adlerkron would be inhuman if he—he—did not . . ."

"Exactly," said Zorndorff; "when we return home you shall hear all about it. Do you feel well enough to go to my aunt's this evening?"

"I do not feel exactly equal to so much noise and talking—but perhaps you intend to go?"

"Of course, I do."

"O, then, let us drive there at once. We shall meet you, I suppose," she added, turning to Virginie. "I am

so glad that you have broken the ice, and intend to go out again.—Edouard says you sing as well as Cyrilla, and that your voices are so alike that one can scarcely distinguish them from each other when you sing together.”

“Our voices have a singular resemblance even in speaking,” replied Virginie; “but Cyrilla sings infinitely better than I do.”

“I hope you will allow Margaret to judge for herself this evening,” said Zorndorff. “I know Adlerkron expects you to sing with him.”

Virginie smiled, and shook her head incredulously.

“Fact, I assure you.—You will see.”

And she did see some music that she had been in the habit of singing with Rupert laid conspicuously on the pianoforte in the music-room by him; and when Cyrilla seemed unwilling to join them, he requested her to accompany him; then to sing with him; others assisted. A little concert was arranged, and Cyrilla was for a short time apparently forgotten.

She walked unheeded through the rooms, and in the last of them sat down on a *prie-Dieu*, and rested her elbow on her knee, her cheek in her hand. A table concealed her from the few people who still loitered near the doorway; but even they were soon drawn towards the music-room, as much by the sound of speaking as singing voices; for even the essentially musical Germans find music a great promoter of general conversation.

Cyrilla’s melancholy train of reflection was broken by hearing the door of her sister’s boudoir open softly, some one enter and walk directly behind her chair. Besides herself, there were but three persons allowed to pass through that apartment, as it communicated with Melanie’s dressing-room. She heard Rupert singing;—she knew the President was in the music-room;—and, without looking up, felt convinced that the person who now leaned on her chair was Zorndorff. There had been something so perversely obstinate in his manner of avoiding her of late—something so mortifying to her feelings, in having, though ever so covertly, to watch him and seek his vicinity, that her pride

had revolted, and caused a sort of desperate resignation, almost immediately perceived by Zorndorff, who, not knowing the total alienation that had taken place, became first uneasy, then alarmed, and at last resolved to temporize.

He now waited in vain for her to look up, and at length said, "Cyrilla—I am here."

"I know it."

"Was I wrong in supposing you wished to speak to me?" he asked with some surprise.

"No."

"Well, then, speak."

"Not here."

"And why not? We are more alone now than we are likely to be in my library. There are but two hours in the day I can call mine—the hours that Margaret sleeps."

"You might have given one to me, when I requested it."

"You came too late."

"If you chose to speak to me, you could come here, I suppose," said Cyrilla, coldly.

"And be interrupted by my uncle, or have Melanie present to interfere between us? No, Cyrilla, if you wish for these papers . . ."

"I have ceased to care about them."

"Indeed! and why?"

"Because I cannot make use of them. The only person to whom I could apply for advice or assistance is Rupert, and you can easily imagine why I—dare not consult him."

"I understand you."

"Melanie is unfortunately, for other reasons, equally unwilling to consult the President.—Of what use would they be to me?"

"Not much if you do not intend to acknowledge your marriage, or wish to have me more in your power than I am at present."

Cyrilla looked at him inquiringly.

"I might now," he continued, "if I chose, deny our marriage, and you would find it very difficult to prove."

"I know," began Cyrilla, with trembling eagerness, "I know that many necessary formalities were omitted;

it was on this that all my hopes were built—I thought—”

“You mistake me,” said Zorndorff, quickly, “I only wished to point out to you that, in every way, you are completely in my power. Without any proof of your marriage, how can you hope to annul it? I so little expected your indifference about these papers, that to prevent any difficulties in establishing my claims hereafter, I have bound Weckmann to me by the strong chain of pecuniary interest, and have never ceased to correspond regularly with him.”

“Who is Weckmann?” asked Cyrilla.

“He who met us at the Geronstère Spring at . . . Spa!”

“I thought his name was Maier—you called him Maier.”

“His name *is* Maier; but you know he is a political exile, and, preferring the character of emigrant, he has assumed the name of Weckmann.”

Although Zorndorff’s explanation was given with some eagerness, it was a matter of such indifference to Cyrilla, that again her head sunk on her hand, and her eyes were fixed on the ground.

Some people began to saunter into the room, and Zorndorff slightly raised his voice as he continued: “He writes often, and gives a most interesting account of the part of America where he resides. Perhaps you would like to see some of his letters?”

“No, thank you—America does not interest me in the least.”

“But his letters would: the descriptions are so vivid, so inspiring, that I have found them irresistible, and have sent him money to purchase land for me on the banks of the Ohio.”

“You?”

“Yes; a voyage across the Atlantic has ceased to be anything very extraordinary.”

Cyrilla had not spirits to jest, and merely shook her head incredulously.

Zorndorff saw his wife and Julie de Lindesmar approaching, and whispered, “Cyrilla, will you meet me this day-week?”

“Is there any use?” she asked, without moving or looking up. “Have I any thing to hope from you?”

“Yes, yes—everything—give me but time to think—to arrange—and—and come earlier—at eleven.—I promise we shall be uninterrupted for two whole hours.”

“I do not want two hours to make a last appeal to your justice and generosity—five minutes will suffice.”

“As you please; but without Melanie.”

“Melanie cannot in any way be a restraint, or” Here Cyrilla stopped, for Julie and Margaret stood before her.

“So here you are—sitting in this quiet corner together,” cried the former, with a half-mischievous, half-inquisitive glance; “and so grave too, that one cannot help suspecting you have been talking of old times.”

Margaret looked inquiringly from one to the other, her wild eyes opening wider as she repeated the words, “Old times!” and then added, “What times?”

“Not very old times either,” said Zorndorff, quietly; “even if you refer to the commencement of my acquaintance with Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron. We were, however, not talking of those times and the fêtes at Freilands, as you perhaps supposed, but of America.”

“America!” said Margaret, “and what about America?”

“I was speaking about a friend of mine who is there.”

“Oh, I know . . . the man who writes so often, and who offered to purchase land; what he called clearings for you?”

Zorndorff nodded his head.

“I dread the arrival of those letters more than I can tell you,” she continued; “they make you so restless and discontented. I cannot imagine how any one can wish to go to America who has a comfortable home here!”

“I can,” interposed Julie. “Nothing I desire so much as to have an opportunity of seeing the world; and if Count Zorndorff will let me know when he intends to set out on his travels, I shall be most happy to accompany him.”

“You must wait until the funeral service has been read

for me," said Margaret, putting her arm within Zorndorff's, and clasping her hands tightly together in a manner that had become habitual to her.

"O, not at all—we could make a little expedition to the back-woods together, and then return here and tell you all about it."

"No, no; he shall not go with you," said Margaret, forcing a smile, and trying to enter into the jest; "I would rather trust him to Cyrilla."

"There *was* a time when you might have thought differently," said Julie, nodding her head with peculiar archness; "but Count Zorndorff could not easily persuade her to go to the back-woods of America with him *now!*"

Like all great talkers, Julie often said more than she intended; but though it is not to be supposed she was quite unconscious that this speech might move her hearers disagreeably, she was by no means prepared for the effect which it instantly produced. Cyrilla rose from her lowly seat, and left the room without bestowing even a passing glance on any of them. Margaret hung heavily on Zorndorff's arm, and looked up into his face with intense anxiety; and that face, though the features were compelled in some degree to assume an appearance of composure, exhibited such fierce internal struggles, that Julie found it difficult to endure the glare of his angry eyes. She had intended to hint in a playful manner what she firmly believed to be the case—that Cyrilla no longer cared for him; but nothing was further from her thoughts than to rouse his ire, as she so evidently had done. She stammered some excuses, which were received coldly enough to mortify her; and then she began a voluble explanation of her words to Margaret, trying to remove her jealous anxiety, and to extricate herself from embarrassment by the contemptible subterfuge but too often used by women, of changing and misplacing the words until they bore quite another meaning. Provoked at finding herself unanswered, she at length shrugged her shoulders and walked away.

"What did she mean?" asked Margaret in a scarcely

audible voice, and trembling violently; "I saw that both you and Cyrilla understood her, and that she was referring to something that I ought to have heard from you—what did she mean?"

"She insinuated that Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron had not forgiven me for preferring you to her."

"But did you prefer me?"

"I gave a tolerably convincing proof of it, I think."

"Yet . . . I remember . . . Ah! now I understand why she will not come to our house, why she avoids us, especially me . . . Why did you not tell me this long ago?"

"Because you are so unreasonably jealous of everybody . . . of everything I may say."

"But I won't be jealous if you tell me the whole truth."

Zorndorff hesitated a moment, and then said: "Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron was staying with her sister the first year I came to Exfort. At that time, you know, I almost lived in my uncle's house . . . could not avoid meeting her every day . . ."

"And . . . and she loved you," cried Margaret, quickly; "tried, perhaps, to alienate your heart from me?"

"She never heard you named, and was not aware of my engagement until informed of it by my father just before I went to Berlin to fulfil it."

"But you think she hoped . . . expected . . . Poor thing, how she must have suffered!"

"More than I like to remember," answered Zorndorff.

"Edouard . . . if it were so . . . you must have paid her attention . . . confess . . . you liked her . . . admired her . . . every one does . . . you forgot me and . . . and . . ."

"There!" said Zorndorff, quietly: "I knew you would be jealous."

"No, no; it is not that . . . but why were you so very angry at Julie's remark?"

"I could not quite patiently endure a taunt which, though apparently aimed at me, fell hard upon a gentle and most innocent woman."

"And are you quite sure, dear Edouard, that recollec-

tions of her were not the cause of that cruel neglect which nearly broke my heart before our marriage?"

"Another useless jealous question," said Zorndorff, smiling coldly.

"No, no; I am not jealous."

"Prove it, then, by never referring to the subject again."

There was something so unusually harsh both in his tone and manner as he pronounced these words, that he effectually silenced and intimidated his wife; but, alas, confirmed all her worst fears. From that evening her suspicious vigilance became unremitting, and at last so intolerable, that he visibly began to chafe at it.

Injudicious woman—she imagined she was riveting his affection when she hung more fondly on his arm, watched all his movements, followed all his looks! She no longer sought Cyrilla's society, to whom the cessation of her proffers of regard and perpetual invitations seemed rather a relief than otherwise. She changed the hour of her daily sleep to a time when Zorndorff's business compelled him to be absent from home; and the two hours which he had once called his were no longer at his disposal. It was absolutely necessary to inform Cyrilla of this change, to appoint some other day, some other time, for the interview now equally desired by both; and for this purpose he once more suddenly appeared at the well-known door of his uncle's study. Great was his annoyance when he beheld his wife stretched on a *chaise longue* just opposite him, her eyes wandering from Melanie and her manuscripts to Cyrilla, who was arranging some drawings in a portfolio. He saw at once that when he was beyond her observation she intended to watch Cyrilla.

He sat down beside Melanie, and, taking up some of the papers strewed on the table, said he came to apologize for not having yet looked them over; but he would read her last poem if she wished it just then, as he had a few minutes to spare.

Always eager to obtain his opinion or corrections, Melanie handed him the well-known red book, and some visitors being at the same moment announced, he walked

with it to one of the windows. His wife's eyes alone pursued him, and she saw that before he had had time to read even the very shortest of poems, his pencil began to move quickly over the tiny page; then, although Melanie was speaking to a stranger who had but lately arrived at Exfort, he almost interrupted her to place the book in her hand, while observing: "I have made a change which I hope will not be disapproved."

Melanie nodded her head, continued speaking as she leaned back in her chair, played carelessly with the little volume until Zorndorff had left the room, and then threw it on the table nearest her.

Margaret's manner had latterly been so intranquil and odd, that Cyrilla could not help watching her with a mixture of uneasiness and wonder. In her eyes and movements there was much of the restlessness of incipient insanity, which her words and acts however strangely contradicted. She spoke rationally, and less of herself than formerly, made great exertions to go out, and, though she looked fatigued, seemed painfully alive to everything passing around her. The presence of strangers was no restraint; they did not interest her, and she began to saunter about the room, first looking at Cyrilla's drawings, and then playing with the flacons and vases on the different tables. As the visitors rose to leave, and while Melanie was standing in the middle of the room, saying some civil parting words, Cyrilla chanced to look again towards Margaret: she had opened Melanie's manuscript-book, and was reading eagerly. Cyrilla laid her hand on it, and observed quietly: "You are not, perhaps, aware that that book is prohibited." She let it fall so hastily, and looked so alarmed, that Cyrilla added, with a smile: "O, there is no great harm done; but as it contains notes and unfinished uncorrected poems, it is an understood thing that it is not to be opened without permission."

"I did not know; I thought when Edouard was permitted . . ."

"She is in the habit of asking his advice and assistance," said Cyrilla; and Melanie unconsciously confirmed all she

had been saying by thrusting the book into her pocket the moment she turned round, and observing, with a smile: "I must study the alterations at my leisure; and if I do not quite approve, you may tell Edouard to prepare for a long discussion at Freilands to-morrow."

"I shall not forget to tell him."

"We meet at dinner then, of course," said Melanie.

"Yes, but not this evening at the Rudharts. Edouard is overpowered with business at present, and has not time to go out."

"He has time enough if he had the inclination."

"I shall not try to induce him," said Margaret, drawing her various draperies around her. "You may easily imagine that I am but too happy to have him all to myself."





CHAPTER XXXV.



CYRILLA, I regret to say that Edouard cannot keep his appointment with you," said Melanie the next morning, as she entered the drawing-room at, for her, an unusually early hour. "I assure you I should this time have been ready at eleven o'clock, had he not written to say that it is absolutely necessary to postpone the meeting for some days."

"I wish I had known it yesterday evening," answered Cyrilla, in a tone of annoyance. "I could not sleep during the night from mere anticipation, and feel now so tired that I do not even wish to go to Freilands."

"But it is exactly there he expects to see you and make some other arrangement."

"Let me see his note," said Cyrilla.

"There is no note; I have forbidden any more enclosures to Wilhelm, as he always seems to think I ought to show them to him; and when Edouard employs one of his servants, Margaret invariably hears of it from Vica, and either asks him tiresome questions, or comes here to me for information, which I have no inclination to give her."

"Then how did he manage to let you know?"

"Yesterday, instead of scanning my lines, as he proposed doing, he wrote a few words under them."

"How very provoking," cried Cyrilla, quickly. "I greatly fear that Margaret read them before you did."

"Impossible! she knows as well as you do that this book is not to be opened without my permission."

"She opened it, nevertheless, and seemed to consider that Edouard's permission extended to her."

"This is intolerable," cried Melanie; "her jealousy makes her forget the commonest rules of good manners. I dare say she saw him writing, and that perhaps made her wish to inspect a book which has hitherto been totally uninteresting to her; but I doubt her having found out the place; for had she read those words we should inevitably have had a scene such as I hope you may never be obliged to witness."

"I saw quite enough that one night," began Cyrilla.

"O that was nothing; she had been so long insensible in the morning, that I knew there was nothing to be feared when I told you to go to her."

A servant entered just then with a small packet from the silversmith's: it contained the little bells ordered by Count Lindesmar for the Polish dance. They were fastened on a steel spring, which gave them the appearance of spurs; and Melanie, as she laid them beside Cyrilla, begged her to try them on and dance a few steps, that she might hear them tinkle; but Cyrilla shook her head, and scarcely looked at them. It was evident that their arrival had not interrupted her train of thought, for she observed, with a sigh: "I quite dread going to Freilands and seeing Rupert, as, with all his apparent carelessness, his memory is excellent, and this very day the three months' silence I imposed on him is at an end. What can I say when he asks for an answer which I am not in the least prepared to give?"

"Tell him you have had no opportunity of speaking to Edouard alone."

"But he will think me so weak, so foolish, not to have insisted on an interview. O, Melanie, tell me what I ought to do!" she exclaimed, kneeling on a footstool beside her sister's chair, and looking up anxiously into her face. "I feel that it is wrong to think of Rupert as I now do while I am still . . . Edouard's . . . wife . . . and he . . . he has so placed me, that even demanding an interview with him has the appearance of an impropriety, and must be done secretly. O, how I hate secrets and secrecy; they are the bane of my life."

Melanie kissed her forehead, while she murmured, "Cyrilla, I cannot counsel you; there is too much at stake—Margaret's life, Edouard's honour, and all my earthly happiness!"

"I know," said Cyrilla, thoughtfully, "I know what I *ought* to do, and I believe I could act honourably, and resign myself to a calamity caused altogether by my own folly; but . . . to make Rupert suffer, after all his kindness and patience . . . is more than I can resolve on. Margaret is getting quite strong, and I still indulge the hope that Edouard will at last relent."

"You labour under a strange mistake with regard to these two men," said Melanie, after a pause. "I have had time and opportunity to know them both well, and our near relationship and extreme intimacy prevented either from concealing their dispositions or tempers from me. Edouard's passions are strong, his will unbending. After what he has said to you, I have not the slightest doubt that he would indeed brave disgrace, imprisonment, death itself, rather than resign you. Now, without meaning in the least to disparage Rupert's affection, which is undoubtedly greater for you than he has ever felt for any one else, I may assure you that you are mistaken if you think his happiness or misery is in your keeping. He is a man of unbounded energy, diversified employments, and cheerful temper. Love is with him an additional occupation—nothing more; he has not an idea of passion or anything resembling it."

"So much the better," cried Cyrilla, "so much the better. I have had enough of all that—too much—it terrifies me now, and that is the reason why I dread speaking to Edouard—I fear him."

"And is not fear, in such a case, preferable to the dull contentment produced by a quiet commonplace affection?"

"No! oh, no!" cried Cyrilla, impetuously.

"We never shall think alike," observed Melanie, resting her head on the back of her chair, and looking at the ceiling, "never! for I could bear any extent of tyranny, provided the cause were—love!"

“And that you loved the tyrant,” suggested Cyrilla.

“That’s it!” cried Melanie. “You have ceased to love, ceased to care for Edouard, just when I supposed you were beginning to forgive, and bear your wrongs with a heroism worthy of your father’s daughter! That Rupert has been the one chosen”

“I suppose,” said Cyrilla, interrupting her, while a slight blush passed across her features, “I suppose you consider *that* worthy of my *mother’s* daughter? Be it so. I have seen my error, and repent it. I wish Edouard no evil, not even the punishment of regret for what he has done. And had I continued indifferent to all others, it is very possible my resignation might have assumed the appearance of heroism, and been much admired by you; for I confess,” she added, rising, and averting her face from her sister, “I have only become aware of all the horrors of my position since I have considered it my duty to combat and conceal the increasing interest and regard I feel for Rupert.”

While still speaking, Rupert himself was announced, and immediately afterwards entered the room.

“I say, Melanie, what did you mean by sending me word you would drive out to Freilands with the President, instead of spending the day there, as you promised me? I supposed you must have had some very important engagement, and here I find you sitting as unconcernedly as if you had not disappointed me in the most outrageous manner.”

“If the loss of our society for a few hours be such a disappointment,” said Melanie, smiling, “what will you call the certainty of enjoying it permanently for a whole month? The continuance of the fine weather has overcome all Wilhelm’s scruples, and you have only to let us know when your leave of absence commences, and we remove to Freilands.”

“Let me write about it this very moment,” cried Rupert, beginning to draw the writing materials towards him. “I must confess it is rather unreasonable asking for leave so soon again, but it will not be refused, as it is

pretty generally known that I shall leave altogether in a few months."

"Have you quite resolved on doing so?" asked Melanie.

"Quite: Cyrilla wishes it," he answered, beginning to write.

A short pantomime was now performed behind his chair. Melanie seemed disposed to give Cyrilla an opportunity of explaining, which the latter declined with piteous looks and shakes of the head; and, when the letter was put in an envelope and sealed, they both agreed, without hesitation, to go at once with him to Freilands.

"Your coming so soon to stay with me will be a pleasant surprise for Virginie," observed Rupert, as they passed from the pavement of the town to the smooth road beyond the fortifications. "The cabbage-garden has begun to disagree with little Alphonse, and she asked me yesterday to allow her to take him to Freilands for a few weeks. I was of course delighted, wondered she had not thought of it before, and naturally concluding she meant to accompany him, begged she would remove there without delay. All at once she thought it necessary to look prodigiously prudish and proper, and said it would be quite impossible for her to reside in my house until you were established there."

"I think she was quite right," said Cyrilla, quickly; "it would have had a very odd appearance."

"Would it?" said Rupert, laughing; "I thought widows with children might do all those sort of things with impunity, and never for a moment doubted that she intended to go to Freilands with her child. As she is now experienced enough to know what she may or may not do, I did not feel in the least disposed to raise any objection to an arrangement that would make the house look inhabited, and give me an agreeable companion whenever I had time to go there."

"O, I dare say not; men seldom have any objection to such arrangements," said Cyrilla, a little petulantly.

"When I was very young," continued Rupert, "I was rather unnecessarily scrupulous in such matters, especially

with the Lindesmars, perhaps because their father was so careless about them, and their mother so singularly intriguing. I am very glad she is likely to remain at Amboise, where she can use her talents in carefully watching the remnant of property which she hopes her son Victor may yet inherit from the old Marquis."

As they passed the gardener's gate, they saw one of Rupert's *fourgons* drawn up before it, and a short time after they met one of his carriages being driven in the same direction.

"Is that for Virginie?" asked Melanie.

"Yes, I have promised either to send for or take her myself to Freilands every day to see Alphonse; she could not bear complete separation from him, you know."

"But surely," observed Cyrilla, "Adrienne could take her there just as well as you?"

"Bellegarde is not particularly obliging about his horses—brothers-in-law seldom are," said Rupert; "it is only cousins and friends who allow themselves to be made use of in that way."

"You allow yourself to be made use of in a most remarkable manner," observed Cyrilla with some pique.

Rupert shrugged his shoulders and played with his whip.

"Every one," she continued with heightened colour, "every one agrees in thinking that Virginie ought to go to her father-in-law, now that he is willing to receive her; the evident interest of her child ought to induce her, no matter how unwilling she may feel to leave her own family, or—Exfort."

Rupert turned suddenly round, half-smiled, seemed inclined to speak, changed his mind, and drove on in silence.

"I am afraid," whispered Melanie, "he thinks you a little—jealous."

Cyrilla started, and was about to disclaim, when a sudden conviction of the truth of the remark flashed across her mind. It was but too true, for the first time in her life she was actually jealous; and what right had she to

be so? None—less than none—the very idea was a mental crime. She leaned back, silent and ashamed, and, on arriving at Freilands, endeavoured to escape alone to the lake. Rupert ran after her, exclaiming, “Cyrilla, come back, I have something to tell you!”

“I know what you mean,” she answered, when he joined her; “it was an absurd weakness on my part pretending not to remember.”

“So you knew all the time, and I intended you to be so surprised! The President must have perfidiously betrayed the trust I placed in him; he was the only one to whom I thought it necessary to explain.”

“The President! oh, Rupert, how could you . . .”

“Why you see, he has a better opinion of me than I perhaps deserve; so I did not choose him even for a few weeks to believe any of the absurd reports about Madame Vinci, which you of course also heard, but did not condescend to care about; however, come with me now, and don’t look as if you were annoyed at my having purchased Selim, and having had him trained for you.”

“For me!”

“For you, and for no one else.”

“Dear Rupert—but you know I cannot ride!”

“I flatter myself I can teach you as well as any riding-master now—if not, I have spent some hours very unprofitably in the circus.”

“Dearest Rupert, how can I thank you sufficiently—I should like so much to learn to ride, if you think I have courage—but—I cannot accept the horse; indeed I cannot, it would create quite a sensation among our friends, and might give rise to all sorts of reports.”

“I hope we shall care very little about that in a short time,” answered Rupert; and then he hurried forward to receive a crowd of guests who had just arrived. They were all in good spirits, and full of expectations of pleasure, for a dinner at Freilands was invariably gay, their host’s happy temper seemed for the time to reflect itself on all in his vicinity.

The day was warm, and dancing being part of the pro-

posed evening amusements, the company preferred lounging about in groups under the trees nearest the house, or sitting on the balcony, to the usual excursions in the park. Selim, the beautiful Arab intended for Cyrilla, was returning from being exercised, just as some officers of Rupert's regiment rode up the avenue, and they simultaneously drew up to inspect and admire him. As Cyrilla and Rupert approached, the groom could not resist the temptation to exhibit some of the animal's accomplishments, and then all the company gathered round them, and Klemmhein declared it would be capital fun if Adlerkron were to represent the Vinci, and favour them with a performance. Every one applauded, the groom dismounted, and Rupert vaulting into the saddle, rode into the lawn.

Nothing could be more perfect than the motions of both horse and rider; but while some of the spectators, with folded arms and eager glances, followed every gesture, fully understanding and appreciating all the niceties of his horsemanship, there were others, whose ignorance on the subject verged on that of the assembled young ladies, whose admiration wavered from the long flowing mane of the horse to the bright face and shining curls of the rider—from the arched neck of the one, to the flexible form of the other, unconscious of the training, practice, and art necessary to produce motions that appeared so natural and easy. Among the ignorant, we may place the greater number of bureaucratists; and at their head his excellency Count Falkenstein, who, arriving during the performance, looked on with the rest, scarcely perceiving the instantaneous obedience of the noble animal to the almost imperceptible signs given him, but greatly pleased with the succeeding springs over bars and portable gates, and delighted when Selim began to draw his legs together, after the manner of a chamois on a ledge of rock, and then stretch them out to their fullest extent; but when he alternately, slowly, and majestically raised and extended his forelegs, or lifted those on the same side together, dancing as if in the circus, the female part of the spectators clapped their hands and advanced to pat his neck, play with his mane, and kiss his nose!

"I never was a rider," said the President to Rupert, "and know nothing of the art, yet I can imagine it very pleasant having the four legs of such an animal at one's command; but," he added, with a smile, "you ought to have had a side-saddle and a cloak as drapery, to show how well he can carry a lady!"

"Is he intended for a lady?" asked Julie de Lindesmar; "perhaps for the future Baroness Adlerkron?"

The President and Rupert looked towards Cyrilla, who turned away and pretended not to have heard.

"What Selim's ultimate destination may be," observed Rupert, as he alighted, "I do not know; for this summer I have placed him at my cousin Cyrilla's disposition."

"O how I wish I had such a cousin!" exclaimed Julie; "how I should adore him!"

"My cousin only just likes me well enough to make use of—my horse," said Rupert, smiling; and then turning to Klemmhein and Captain Stauffen, he asked them if they felt inclined for a game of "chalked gloves."

"And may I ask what that may be?" interposed the President; "the name is not very suggestive."

"It is a sort of joust which we learned from the equestrian troop who have just left Exfort," replied Rupert. "The combatants run against or chase each other on horseback within a limited space; the dress a dark-coloured coat; the only weapon a well chalked chamois glove. To bestow the mark of a white hand on the left shoulder of one's opponents, and avoid receiving the same oneself, must be the aim of *three riders*—whoever escapes unmarked, has won; but we adjudge the prize to whoever manages to avoid the mark the longest, as the two who have lost naturally make common cause against the winner, and very good riding is necessary to evade the double pursuit if only for five or six minutes. The game amused us greatly last week; but whether or not Klemmhein will choose to be chalked before so many bright eyes as will now look on . . . I know not."

"I have no objection to take my chance," said Klemmhein; "but the enclosure must be larger than last time,—I will not manœuvre in so small a space again."

“And I,” interposed Stauffen, “decline giving Adlerkron the advantage of such a horse as Selim—he must not be better mounted than we shall be.”

“All fair,” said Rupert; “Selim did give me the victory last time—I will take Dr. Faust to-day—have you any objection to him?”

“Decidedly, he is scarcely inferior to Selim, if it were not for the chance of his getting impatient and leaping the barriers.”

“Well, well,” cried Rupert, laughing, “let Klemmhein order out the movable fence, and give whatever directions he pleases about the enclosure, and do you choose my horse, while I go to receive the last of my guests.”

It was Zorndorff's faultless equipage which just then appeared in the distance, advancing so rapidly that Rupert had but just time to reach the portico before it drew up, with that suddenness which appears so correct in a town, so unnecessary in the country. A footman and chasseur sprang to the ground, and the latter, in his green braided coat, silver belt, cocked hat and waving green feathers, peered into the carriage after Zorndorff had descended from it, with an expression of grave attention on his wondrously bearded countenance, while assisting as much as he could the movements of the little lady who still remained in it, and who, after the removal of a footstool and various air-cushions, at length made her appearance. Magnificently dressed in pink brocaded silk, her dark hair confined by bands of costly pearls, the paleness of her features ameliorated by the reflection from her own dress, and the bright colours that fell on her from the large painted glass window which lighted the staircase where it branched off to the right and left,—her appearance was striking, picturesque, almost beautiful; and Rupert, in his peculiarly sincere manner, without a moment's hesitation, told her so; she looked back to Zorndorff, who was following them, and smiled.

“Being imprisoned in a carriage, with all the windows up, on such a day,” he observed, with a look of weariness, “may give you a becoming flush, but it has almost stifled me.”

“I hope,” said Rupert, hurrying her forward, “I hope you are not afraid to venture on the balcony; we intend before dinner to ride a game of chalked gloves . . . but it will not last long.”

“Have we mistaken the hour? are we too early?”

“By no means—I shall request the President not to give us more than ten minutes; the moment he raises a flag the game will end. We shall be enormously flattered if you will look at us, even from a window,” he added, on perceiving that she went towards the end room, usually occupied by Melanie. He rolled what he supposed to be the most comfortable chair towards her, murmured a few words of apology, and passing through the other rooms, was followed to the lawn by all those who had previously taken their post in the balcony.

“Margaret, have you any objection to my opening the window?” asked Zorndorff.

“O no, not the least,” she answered eagerly, fearing that the slightest demur might be used as an excuse to leave her. He threw it wide open, leaned out, and watched the busy scene beneath him with an immovable composure, partly, perhaps, assumed from the consciousness that she was as usual closely watching him.





CHAPTER XXXVI.

UNDER Klemmhein's directions a tolerably large space was enclosed, and the spectators retired to a clump of oaks, and seated themselves on garden-chairs, camp-stools, and benches; crowds of servants, under pretence of assisting, hurried to and fro. The officers, whose arrival had been the incentive to all these proceedings, again mounted, and took up their stations at different parts of the barriers; the President advanced, his eyes fixed intently on his watch, and followed by a servant carrying a folded flag, and at the same moment three horses were led forward. Rupert, Klemmhein, and Stauffen, after exchanging some gestures of mock defiance, advanced to meet them; laughingly, but with unusual attention, they examined girths, bit, and bridle, drew on their gloves, vaulted lightly into their saddles, and extended their right hands to be chalked. Rupert could not resist the temptation to try his on the shoulder of the groom, who had evidently bestowed a double quantity on his master's glove, with the laudable intention of making his victory notorious: nothing could be more perfect than the impression of the sprawling hand; nothing more exhilarating than the shout of laughter that followed.

The President gave the signal, and they all pressed eagerly forward: even in doing so, there was something characteristic in their manner. Klemmhein was daring and thoughtless, Rupert agile and dexterous, Stauffen steady and wary; and these qualities they exhibited un-

remittingly as they chased each other round the enclosed space, endeavouring to keep close to the fence, where the left shoulders were safe from their opponents, and their right hands ready to descend should opportunity offer. Unceasing were the impetuous charges made by Klemmheim to obtain this envied position, but Stauffen's horse invariably reared to save his rider from the intended blow; and Rupert not unfrequently threw himself completely on the other side of his, and laughed merrily as Klemmheim's hand waved violently and fruitlessly in the air above him. One or two narrow escapes at length made Rupert in earnest and Stauffen determined; unconsciously they made common cause against their impetuous adversary, and after the following encounter Klemmheim bore the mark of defeat on his jacket; rendered desperate by having nothing more to lose, he dashed after Stauffen, who, in his endeavours to escape him, received the dreaded mark from Rupert, while passing him in full career. From that moment the interest of the spectators increased visibly; they pressed towards the barriers, and unreservedly bestowed all their anxiety on Rupert, who, hotly pursued by adversaries who had nothing to fear from him, was obliged to make use of all his art and activity to escape; he turned so often and so suddenly, forced his horse to such violent springs that he was for some time unapproachable; and at length, when hemmed in completely, and just as every one supposed all lost, he threw himself flat on his back, and once more laughed as the hands waved harmlessly over his head. How much longer he could have evaded his pursuers it is hard to say; they were again forcing him to perform the most extraordinary manoeuvres, when the President gave the signal to unfurl the flag, and declared Rupert victor.

As they all walked together towards the house, discussing what Melanie called their modern tournament, Klemmheim observed, "You see, Stauffen, the horse makes no difference, you might as well have let Adlerkron have had Faust."

"I suppose so," said Stauffen, "he has so many different

ways of riding that I don't intend to enter the lists with him again, if I can help it."

"I must acknowledge," said the President, "that the joust was interesting, very much so indeed, and if we had had time, I should have had no objection to witness another bout. I dare say there are others in this far-famed regiment who would have been equally willing to exhibit their skill in horsemanship."

"I don't think we could easily find three more such riders," observed one of the officers, laughing.

"It would be better," said Count Lindesmar, "and a vast deal more chivalrous, were we to put on armour and break a lance, as our ancestors did before us. Could not we get up a tournament or carousal here, and send to Windhorst for a cartload of armour?"

"I like the idea," said Rupert, "and beg you will remind me of it some time hence; for the present, I want to engage you all for my theatre, which has been fitted up according to Zorndorff's plan, and is really very pretty."

The President seemed to dread a discussion about the theatre, and not without reason, for Rupert was instantly surrounded and overwhelmed with questions.

"Um . . . a . . . your *chef* will not be satisfied if you are not punctual," he observed, drawing forth the watch so hated by Melanie; "and . . . a . . . I suppose you will think it necessary to change your dress, and . . ."

"I should think so," replied Rupert, laughing as he sprang up the steps, and entered the house with his companions, whose toilets had become disordered.

The President paced the balcony, his hands clasped on his back, and exchanging occasionally a few words with Melanie and her companions. Zorndorff had closed the window, out of which his wife now listlessly gazed, silent and abstracted, until roused by Virginie's approaching her, and saying, "I have followed the advice of my friends, and put aside my mourning."

"For friends, read Rupert," whispered Zorndorff; "I suppose he likes red, or pink, or whatever the colour of your dress is called."

"I don't know," she answered in a low voice; "but he

dislikes black, and why should I wear it any longer? I believe he prefers white to any colour, a dress like . . . like *that*," she added, pointing to the long glass, which it may be remembered had been placed by the upholsterer opposite the doorway, to prolong the vista of the suite of rooms. In it they now saw Cyrilla issuing from the corresponding apartment at the other side of the house. Rupert was beside her, and apparently speaking eagerly, for his head was bent down, and she seemed to listen gravely and attentively, though she still continued to walk on through the intervening rooms: suddenly he stopped, took her hand, and endeavoured to place a ring on one of her fingers . . . Zorndorff, who had retired with Virginie as much aside as was compatible with a view of both figures in the glass, now started forward, and uttered a smothered exclamation, which attracted his wife's attention; she followed the direction of his eyes, and with him (in the glass) distinctly saw Cyrilla's hurried agitated refusal of the ring, notwithstanding her cousin's evident expostulations,—saw her also turn quickly back into the music-room, while Rupert slowly and thoughtfully advanced towards those who now began to enter the large drawing-room from both doors and balcony.

"I wish, Madam," observed Zorndorff to Virginie, in a low voice, "I wish for your sake he had offered any bauble rather than a ring—however, this second refusal must be conclusive, I should think."

"There is some strange confusion here," said Margaret, drawing Virginie towards her; "we thought it was you he preferred."

"I have had no reason to think so," replied Virginie, turning away.

"It is extremely foolish of Cyrilla to refuse him," continued Margaret, with unusual animation; "I wish I knew her well enough to tell her so; but I can speak to our aunt Melanie, who . . ."

"I request, Margaret, you will not interfere in any thing that so little concerns you," said Zorndorff, coldly. "This glass has betrayed a secret which we should certainly never have been told; the less we speak about it

the better—in fact, we ought to try and forget it altogether.”

“Can *you* forget it so easily?” she asked, with more meaning than he quite liked; and as Virginie left the room, she added, “Do you not more than suspect that recollections of you have made her act so unwisely?”

“I leave such surmises to you, Margaret,” replied Zorndorff, turning away to hide the flush of consciousness that he felt spreading over his countenance.

“I could pity, if I did not fear her,” said Margaret. “Tell me . . . did she . . . love you as I did . . . and do?”

“No, Margaret, she never fainted—or even cried for me.”

“Then, after all, perhaps it was merely a passing admiration on her part . . . But Julie says, it was supposed she refused her cousin three years ago on your account, and that you . . .”

“So,” said Zorndorff, interrupting her, “so you have been making inquiries?”

“But no one seems to know any thing; and it is the mystery that makes me uneasy. O, Edouard, if you would only tell me the whole truth—every thing without reserve!”

“It would be a great satisfaction to you,” he said, ironically, “to have some one—or some thing to complain of besides your nerves! What more have I to tell you?—that during the three months that Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron has been in Exfort I have spoken to her twice—once in our house, and once at my uncle’s?”

“And where will you speak to her for the third time?” asked Margaret, quickly.

“Here, if opportunity offer,” replied Zorndorff, so unhesitatingly, that what she knew to be the blunt truthfulness of his answer completely confounded her.

The gay dinner was a painful exertion to her—and to Cyrilla. Zorndorff was unusually gay; he even appeared wonderfully interested about Rupert’s theatre, and joined the President in discussing its capabilities. With all the

versatility of talent usually exhibited by amateur performers, most of the company declared their willingness to take parts, whether in tragedy, comedy, or opera; in short, it at last became evident that, among such histrionic geniuses, subordinate characters must be altogether dispensed with, "if," as Rupert observed with perfectly serious intentions,—“if it would not be a famous good plan to get a cargo of such understrappers from one of the theatres in Berlin!”

In the course of the evening, Rupert made several bungling attempts to arrange a *tête-à-tête* between Cyrilla and Zorndorff; but either Julie or Margaret frustrated all his efforts, and at last he gave the case up as hopeless, and proposed the Polish dance. Then it was discovered that Major Arnheim having gone to his father to make arrangements about his marriage, his betrothed had no partner, and it became necessary to press Zorndorff into the service. He was absently studying the frescoes on the ceiling when Rupert laconically informed him, that “they wanted a man.”

“Take my uncle,” he answered; “in your house he always seems to grow twenty years younger, and joins in everything that is going on.”

“He is very good-natured, certainly,” said Rupert, “but this dance is quite beyond his powers. We all know your indolent propensities, and would not bore you if we could help it; but, as we have agreed to let you choose your partner, you can scarcely refuse, I think.”

“I suppose not,” said Zorndorff, slowly rising. “Will you let me have . . . Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron?”

Count Lindesmar, with whom she was to have danced, resigned her with some affected but a great deal more real reluctance.

Whatever Zorndorff did he did well; and those who supposed he required to learn a dance he had two or three times attentively observed, were mistaken. But he had a habit of listening with mock attention to any one who was disposed to give him instruction, no matter on what subject; and now, with the greatest composure, fixing his

eyes on Count Lindesmar, let him explain the figure and caper before him, while he himself neither moved muscle of face nor foot.

Margaret's eyes followed every turn, every movement; and when the music ceased, and Zorndorff again sat down beside her, and, leaning back in his chair, once more began the interrupted contemplation of the ceiling, she turned to him with a mixture of surprise and annoyance, and said, "I was not aware that dancing was one of your accomplishments!"

"It happens to be one of the very few I ever acquired," he replied.

"You never danced with me."

"I believe we were never together in society until after our marriage, when people generally cease to dance with each other. In a small circle of this kind, however, that should be no impediment; and if you feel in the least inclined just now to join that mazurka, I"

"You know that was not what I meant," she said, with some irritation.

"Then, what *do* you mean?"

"O, nothing of any consequence but I should like to know what you said to Cyrilla. I saw your lips move when you were dancing You spoke to her."

"Yes. I told her you intended to give a ball before you closed your house for the summer."

"And was that all? Did you not ask her to dance at it with you?"

"No; for though I could not, without rudeness, avoid dancing this evening, I know that Arnheim will have returned before your ball. He will dance with his *fiancée*, and then Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron will naturally choose either Lindesmar or Adlerkron."

And all this was true; but when Rupert found an opportunity soon after to ask Cyrilla, "When? where?" her answer was—

"The evening of the ball. At his own house, during the cotillon, he will speak to me in the library."



CHAPTER XXXVII.



ONTRARY to his usual custom, and under pretence of wishing to make himself popular, Zorndorff requested that an unusual number of invitations should be issued for this last ball; and though Margaret ventured to object, reminded him that their rooms were not large enough for so many people; that a crush would be inevitable, and she might become ill in consequence; he persisted, and for once their house was as full as the President's on those evenings when Zorndorff professed to remain at home in order to facilitate, as far as lay in his power, the respiration of the suffocating inhabitants of Exfort! Many were invited to the Zorndorffs' for the first time that evening, and they were easily distinguished from the habitual guests by the manner in which they examined the pictures, marbles, vases, inlaid tables, and bronzes. Many were the fruitless efforts made to get into the library and adjoining breakfast-room; but both apartments were locked, and it was whispered that Count Zorndorff feared that the passing and repassing of the crowd might injure the plants in the conservatory. Much as Zorndorff at other times was in the habit of considering the well-being of these same plants, and highly as he valued many of them, it is quite certain that not one thought had been bestowed on them by him for many days, although the keys of both rooms were just then actually in his possession.

It was observed that the Countess Zorndorff was equally

fantastically and becomingly dressed on this occasion. Her sea-green robe, composed of the most transparent material, was so flounced and furbelowed, that every movement produced a light waving of something green, almost resembling undulating water, which, added to a profusion of water-lilies that seemed to float on it, and others that hung pendant from her shining hair, gave her altogether the appearance of a Naiad.

The texture of Cyrilla's dress was similar, but it was white, and unrelieved by any colour whatever: even the natural flowers, and wreaths of ivy, and other parasitic plants, for the tasteful arrangement of which she had long been remarkable, had been altogether avoided. She looked unusually pale, and though she danced incessantly during the evening, not the faintest tinge of colour passed over her features. As the music of the cotillon began she left the ball-room, and found Melanie waiting for her, as she had promised, in a room called "The Rococo," from its having an elaborately ornamented fireplace, mirrors in curiously carved gilt frames, crooked-legged chairs to match, and a profusion of fat cupids and slender shepherdesses, making themselves useful and ornamental in an equally ingenious and wonderful manner. While Cyrilla stood with her eyes fixed vacantly on the grotesque ornaments of the chimney-piece, and shivering, not from cold, but from an irrepressible horror of the approaching interview, Zorndorff walked silently through the room, making a scarcely perceptible sign to Melanie to follow.

"Cyrilla," she whispered, "we may go now."

"I know . . . wait a moment . . . Tell me . . . did he look cheerful, or . . . or . . . earnest?"

"He looked as pale and anxious as yourself, my poor child," replied Melanie; "but," she added, glancing round her, "let us go, while we can do so unperceived. These people are not observing us now."

The locked doors were open, the rooms lighted, and Cyrilla walked forward through the first with more firmness than her sister expected. At the entrance to the library she stopped, and appeared to wait for Melanie,

who, however, with a slight wave of her hand, declined to follow, opened a glass-door, and seemed half-disposed to escape into the garden.

“ Oh, Melanie, you surely will not desert me in this distressful moment ? ”

“ My presence can serve no good purpose,” answered Melanie ; “ any restraint will only serve to irritate Edouard. I know the useless appeals that would be made to my judgment—know that, without benefiting either, I should inevitably offend both ; a mediatrix, in such cases, is worse than useless.”

“ Tell me, at least, whether or not I ought to confess to Edouard that I now prefer some one else to him.”

“ You had better not unnecessarily rouse his jealousy, but go—do not lose any more time—here is the fatal ring he gave you that unfortunate morning at Spa—returning it to him will bring you at once to the subject you must discuss.”

As Cyrilla reluctantly opened the door, and then stood at it gasping rather than breathing, Melanie saw that all the doors and windows of the library were covered with their heavy crimson curtains ;—that, on the writing-table, a large lamp burned brightly, and that Zorndorff was walking up and down the room with hurried steps and folded arms. He came quickly towards them, and having recommended Melanie to lock the door of the room she was in to prevent interruption, he closed the one between them, and, unperceived by either of the sisters, softly turned the key in the lock, and then followed Cyrilla to the table, where, extending a visibly trembling hand, she endeavoured to deposit the hated seal-ring. Perhaps his following her so closely increased her agitation—perhaps an indistinctness, which seemed to pervade everything around her, prevented her from calculating the distance ; the ring fell from her hand, and bounded like a thing alive along the smooth parquet floor.

“ It is of little importance,” murmured Zorndorff, as he stooped to pick it up, and slowly and gravely placed it on his finger. “ Ring or no ring, you are mine ; and though

fully aware what you mean by returning it to me, I cannot help being glad to have it again, for I have never known peace of mind since I parted with it."

"Nor I," said Cyrilla, "since it has been in my possession."

"Twice has this ring had strange influence over my destiny," he said thoughtfully. "Never will I part with it again with my consent!" Then opening a drawer of the table, and taking a small packet from it, he added: "Here are the papers you wished to have, and I so willingly resign to you. The sooner you make our relation to each other known to the world, the better for me—death or insanity must be my portion if my present life continue much longer."

"Edouard," said Cyrilla, gently, "it is not for these papers I have come to you—you know it is not. I have no desire whatever to make known our unfortunate, ill-advised marriage. You told Melanie—you have told me, that you can have it annulled if you choose to do so; and I trust that such is your intention, now that there is no longer the slightest doubt that Margaret is recovering her health completely—visibly—daily!"

"Curse her!" muttered Zorndorff, between his closed teeth.

"Heaven forbid," said Cyrilla, earnestly. "Her offence or weakness has been mine too—we have both loved you better and trusted you more than you deserved."

Zorndorff began to stride up and down the room. Cyrilla advanced a few steps, and continued, with ill-suppressed emotion, "Listen to me, Edouard; do not persist in making two women wretched. You have publicly acknowledged Margaret as your wife for two years; she is lost for ever if you desert her now; for me, there is still hope . . ." She paused, and anxiously watched the expression of his face, before she added, "I might forget the past and be happy once more, if restored to my former freedom of action and thought."

"And would not the thoughts be mine as much as ever?" he asked, with that pathos which she had formerly found irresistible.

Cyrilla shook her head. "No, Edouard, I have long taught myself to think of you as the husband of another woman, without anger, without jealousy."

"You say that to try me, Cyrilla; it is not, cannot be true."

"It *is* true: had it been otherwise, I must have died."

"Not when you knew that my affection for you continued unabated, increasing rather, day by day, from the horrible contrast offered me at home."

"I cannot listen to you if you speak in this way," said Cyrilla. "Surely you must feel that all your professions of regard for me now must sound like mockery. Spare me, and do not let us waste in idle discussion these precious moments, obtained with such difficulty."

"You are right," said Zorndorff, with a quick glance towards the clock. "I know not why I endeavour to evade an explanation which is inevitable." Here he paused, and looked very earnestly at her, while adding slowly, "Cyrilla, say what you will, I am convinced you love me still!"

"Pass over that," she answered hastily; "it is irrelevant."

"By no means, Cyrilla; to me it is of the greatest importance to be assured that such is the case."

She slowly shook her head, and turned away from him in silence more eloquent than words.

"Resentful girl! can all my wretchedness and penitence procure no commiseration, no pardon from you?"

"Both," she answered eagerly; "both to the fullest extent, when once relieved from this thralldom, that makes me even more unhappy than yourself. Be generous, Edouard, and my pardon—I mean my gratitude—my—my friendship . . ."

"Your friendship," he repeated, ironically, "and your love you perhaps reserve for Lindesmar?"

"Count Lindesmar!" said Cyrilla, with a look of unfeigned astonishment.

"And have you really never observed what is so evident to every one else? Women are generally clear-sighted enough on such occasions."

“ I never observed—never thought of him at all.”

“ Then,” cried Zorndorff, eagerly, “ you can give me the assurance I desire. Oh, Cyrilla, say that you never have loved—promise that you never will love—any one but me.”

“ No,” she replied, blushing deeply, “ I will not deceive you, or make a promise I cannot keep. The wish to love and be loved in return is too innate a feeling for a woman ever to have the power of emancipating herself from it.”

“ Enough,” cried Zorndorff, haughtily ; “ we remain then as we are.”

They were both too eager and too anxious at that moment to hear a rustling noise in the adjoining conservatory ; too intensely occupied with each other, to perceive a pale face with wild dark eyes glaring at them through the thick foliage of some tropical plants.

“ Then,” said Cyrilla, faintly, “ you had already resolved not to consent to a divorce ?”

“ Consent !” exclaimed Zorndorff, forcing a laugh, “ never !”

“ Oh, what tyranny !” she began, clasping her hands tightly together ; but Zorndorff stood so unmoved, that she suddenly remembered he was callous to angry words and reproaches. After a hard struggle for composure, she advanced towards him, placed her hand on his arm, and said in a low constrained voice, “ I will forgive, forget all you have made me suffer for nearly three years, if—if . . .” she hesitated, and then exclaimed passionately, “ Oh, Edouard, you surely cannot have the cruelty to intend me to drag on the remainder of my life in this state of dreary hopelessness !”

“ No, dearest love,” he cried, drawing her towards him with a vehemence she did not dare to resist, vainly hoping that at last he was about to relent ; “ No ! Let us fly from these intolerable endless trials—let us leave for ever this country, where nought but frustrated plans and disappointed hopes have been our portion. In America, that land of promise to all our suffering countrymen, a home already awaits us. I have delayed this explanation until all, even the most minute, arrangements have been com-

pleted—It was but yesterday I sent the last remittance to Cincinnati, forwarded a large sum of money to London, and received the passport I required from Berlin. Delay will now be dangerous in every way, for, should my intention to leave Germany be spoken of, should anything about this passport transpire, I shall be compelled to excuse conduct so apparently criminal, by a full confession of our clandestine marriage at Spa.”

Cyrilla released herself from him with the energy of despair, but all her attempts at articulation were ineffectual.

“Don’t look so horrified; have I not a right to ask you to follow me to America, Africa, anywhere in the world?”

She did not answer, but grasped the nearest chair, and seemed to breathe with difficulty, while an increased paleness overspread her features.

Zorndorff became uneasy. “Cyrilla—my love—for Heaven’s sake speak to me.”

But she only gazed at her tormentor with quivering lips.

“You are alarmed—shocked—” he continued, “and must have time to consider this proposal. Remember, I do not ask you to commit a crime, I only entreat you to fulfil a duty. See, at your feet I entreat—implore you to consent—implore when I might—command.”

Although strongly impressed with the idea that she still clung to him with undiminished affection, the expression of her face, as she struggled to release her hand from his, had something so very like abhorrence, that he started up, and some violent explosion of passion might have ensued, had she not murmured the word “Margaret” as she turned to leave him.

“Bestow your compassion on me rather than on her,” he said bitterly; “she aided and abetted in the most infamous imposition that ever was practised on man! Stay, Cyrilla, and hear all my misery!”

“No—my own portion is enough for me,” she answered, sighing deeply; “our conference is at an end, and I shall never demand another.”

“Then you must hear me now,” cried Zorndorff, vehemently. “Margaret has imposed on me—deceived me—talked of her nerves—pretended somnambulism—all to prevent my discovering, or even suspecting, the real nature of her disease, until it was too late. Her physician, too, was in the plot, and never even hinted that fits of the most frightful description have been hereditary in her family for many generations !”

“Fits !”

“Epilepsy, and to a degree that admits of no hope ; and she may live, Cyrilla, live, like most of her family, long enough to become an idiot, and to make me a maniac !”

“No, no, no, no—never—never !” screamed a voice from the conservatory, and, with a harsh horrid cry of anguish, Margaret rushed into the room. The ghastliness of her appearance was greatly increased by her ball-dress with its artificial flowers, and she seemed to feel this herself, for she tore the lilies from her hair with frantic gesticulations, flung them on the ground, and stamped her foot upon them.

Cyrilla thought her mad, and endeavoured to move unperceived towards the door ; but Margaret sprang after her, and with a strength that seemed supernatural, held her arm, while she gasped out the words, “He . . . that man there, is false, Cyrilla—false—you know it as well—no, not so well as I do *now* ! But I loved him—O, so devotedly, that had I known the nature of my illness, I call Heaven to witness, had I known it, I should never have been his wife !”

With passionate gestures, and breathless eagerness, she continued rapidly : “At no period of our acquaintance did I endeavour to deceive him in any way. He knew that I was wretchedly unhealthy—every one knew it ; but from a mistaken notion of kindness or consideration, no one ever mentioned the word epilepsy before me. I now understand it all ; it was for this reason that my father made me promise never to dismiss Vica, who has been with me from my infancy. It was fits of this kind that wore out my brother and brought him to an early grave,

and it is this which is now to make me an idiot!" Here she released Cyrilla's arm, shuddered—and, looking wildly round her, advanced a few steps nearer Zorndorff, and said, "You love riches and luxury, Edouard—they are even dearer to you than honour—I would not deprive you of them if I could—but all I have is yours. Is it not so? Was not that the purport of the paper I signed a few days after my father's death? Even that did not enlighten me. I was an idiot even then, Edouard; but for the short remainder of my life you will give me a pittance to secure me from want, for I—cannot work—you know."

"Good Heavens, Margaret, what do you mean?" exclaimed Zorndorff, in a voice stifled by contending emotions.

"I mean to leave you—for ever. After what I have heard this night, what else can I do? Your house is no longer mine; but God is merciful, and will provide me a place where I may hide my wretchedness from the eyes of the world."

She was evidently in a state of desperate excitement as she pronounced these words, and perceptibly staggered while endeavouring to reach one of the glass doors that opened into the garden.

"Margaret, where are you going? Listen to me. Let me explain—" cried Zorndorff, while he placed himself before her, endeavouring to prevent her from falling; but, as he touched her, she sprang from him, with a long loud piercing scream, and throwing her arms round Cyrilla, clung to her convulsively. Melanie, alarmed by the unexpected shriek, made violent but ineffectual efforts to enter the room. Zorndorff strode towards Cyrilla, and casting a look of horror on his wife, tried to remove her. She writhed as if in agony, breathed quickly, gasped, moaned, sobbed, and when at length her head was raised, the paleness of death was on her features, as they worked in hideous convulsions. The rolling of the sightless eyes, the audible grinding of the teeth, the white foam that gathered round the parted lips, shocked Cyrilla beyond measure. She had never seen any one in a similar state; and though compassion at first induced her to repel Zorn-

dorff's attempts to relieve her, and she tried as well as she could to support the suffering woman, who seemed to have sought her protection; yet, on perceiving that total unconsciousness had commenced, she endeavoured to assist him. One hand had closed on her arm with a grasp of iron, and he gently, yet firmly, drew up one by one the convulsed fingers, letting the hand close of itself in a manner probably well known to him; but the long emaciated fingers of the other, on being less carefully, though with great difficulty, extricated from Cyrilla's hair, fell on the shoulder nearest them, and in a moment the nails were buried in the flesh; every effort to remove them causing long scratches, from which the blood flowed. Cyrilla recoiled, and though no sound escaped her lips, she unintentionally betrayed some impatience and pain, as, in self-defence, she pulled the offending hand. Zorndorff became exasperated—furious. He used force—angry force,—dragged back the fingers,—and when at last the hand was in his, flung it so violently from him, that the unhappy woman fell heavily to the ground, where the convulsions subsided by degrees into a more than death-like rigidity.

"I have murdered her," he said gloomily, as he raised the lifeless form, and placed it on a sofa; and while Cyrilla sprang to the door to admit Melanie, tears of remorse gushed plentifully from his eyes.

Melanie was more annoyed than surprised to find her niece in the room. The scream had made known to her the disagreeable interruption of the important interview; but so unconscious was she that anything more than a common attack of epilepsy had taken place, that she unlocked the doors, admitted fresh air through the windows, rang the bell, and felt Margaret's pulse with perfect composure.

"Doctor Hurtig and Vica," she said calmly to the servant, who instantly appeared. And when directly afterwards the latter entered the room, she turned to Cyrilla, and scarcely looking at her, observed, "We must return to the ball-room, it will never do if we are all absent—I hope we have not been missed."

And Cyrilla followed her into the adjoining room in silence; but there, throwing herself into the nearest chair, she burst into a passion of tears.

It was only then that Melanie perceived her sister's crushed dress, disordered hair, and bleeding shoulder; she stopped and looked at her with an expression of amazement and inquiry.

"Margaret overheard—all—" said Cyrilla; but tears choked her utterance, and further explanation was then impossible.





CHAPTER XXXVIII.



HERE are few human beings to whom the immediate and complete realization of their most ardent wishes would bring unalloyed satisfaction. Many may at first feel disposed to doubt this—none would have done so more unreservedly than Zorndorff, the evening of the eventful ball at his own house. A few, a very few days had passed over, and the scarcely concealed desire of his heart had been fulfilled. Margaret lay stretched on her bed—a corpse—and he was sole possessor of all her wealth! Was he satisfied, contented, happy? He did not appear so. There was a terrible earnestness in his manner, as he sat beside the dead, his eyes wandering from the rigid outline of the lifeless form, to the marble-like features which he examined, as if their perfect symmetry had never struck him until then. Occasionally he bent forward, gazed long and anxiously into the but half-closed eyes, and then with a sort of shudder applied a handkerchief to the parted lips, from which some drops of blood occasionally trickled.

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The sudden death of the Countess Zorndorff caused an unusual sensation in the town of Exfort. Even those whose knowledge of her was limited to having seen her languidly reclining in one of her luxurious carriages as she passed them in the streets, or to having stared at her from some obscure corner of the theatre, now eagerly discussed her domestic sorrows, real or supposed—indulged freely in

conjectures as to the immediate cause of her death—related circumstantially all they had ever heard of her or her family, and endeavoured to increase the mystery which had pervaded everything concerning her by all the means in their power. With a large proportion of the population of the town, the porter at the President's house rose to an unprecedented degree of importance when it became known that Vica and her niece were relations of his, that he would probably marry the latter, and was perhaps already in possession of all the secrets of the Zorndorff family! He, however, considering his situation of a partly official description, thought it incumbent on him to maintain a dignified silence on this occasion, and paced his room as nearly as possible in the same manner as his master did his study, sternly unobservant of all attempts at colloquy, and giving precisely the same answer to every servant who came with compliments, cards, or condolences, "Her excellency, the *Frau Presidentin*, was tolerably well, but too much fatigued to receive any one."

Rupert heard this message being loudly and pompously delivered as he passed—it told him where he was likely to find his cousins, and he walked directly, and without being announced, to Melanie's boudoir. She made a motion of silence to him as he entered, and pointed to Cyrilla, who lay asleep on a sofa—her cheeks flushed, her eyelids swelled, and a pink streak along her eyebrows, showing but too plainly that the handkerchief which she held in the hands clasped under her head had been placed there to receive tears, of which weariness alone had caused the cessation.

Rupert noiselessly disencumbered himself of his sabre; and then drawing a chair close to Melanie, he looked towards Cyrilla, and asked in a whisper if that was the effect the Countess Zorndorff's death had had on her?

"She is perfectly inconsolable," answered Melanie in the same manner.

"I suppose," he said, after a pause, "I suppose she fears that Zorndorff will now insist on the fulfilment of her promises to him?"

Melanie nodded her head two or three times, and then said; "One cannot blame him for doing so."

"Will she consent?" he asked, with forced composure.

"I am afraid not."

"Afraid?"

"Why, yes; she must either fulfil her engagement to him, or—or—in short she cannot marry any one else without his consent, and of that there is not the slightest chance now."

"Melanie," said Rupert, after another and longer pause, "if you have in any way used your influence in persuading Cyrilla to make an agreement of so very questionable a description, you have betrayed the confidence placed in you by my aunt when she committed her to your care, and blighted for ever the happiness of those whose interest ought to have been nearest to you. Heaven only knows where the mischief will end!"

"Rupert," cried Melanie, quickly, "remember you have promised not to interfere . . ."

"Unfortunately, I have made a promise to that effect; when I did so, it was under the impression that Cyrilla would confide in me without reserve at the end of a few months, and that I should be able to prove her promises and fears alike chimerical."

Tears stood in Melanie's upturned eyes as she exclaimed: "O, could I have foreseen the total extinction of a first love, so replete with the freshest feelings of youth, so exuberant on both sides with all that enchains the imagination, and . . ."

"Pshaw!" cried Rupert impatiently. "On Cyrilla's side there may have been a good deal of natural admiration for a remarkably handsome man; but it was you and your incessant encomiums of Zorndorff that made her fancy she loved him."

"Really, Rupert," said Melanie, with some irritation, "you seem to forget that Edouard is quite as capable of inspiring affection as yourself, perhaps even more so, if reports may be trusted."

"I have not forgotten his celebrity in that way," re-

joined Rupert; "but I am convinced that, educated as Cyrilla has been, more than common means were used to induce her to make a promise which even his marriage with another woman could not annul. However, she has seen her error, has ceased altogether to care for him, and I am now resolved that she shall not be persuaded by you, or forced by him, into a marriage against her inclinations."

Rupert unconsciously raised his voice as he pronounced these words. Cyrilla moved, looked up, and extended her hand to him.

"I am afraid I have disturbed you," he said, with unfeigned annoyance.

"No, for I only intended to sleep until you came. Yesterday, I heard you were on guard, and did not expect to see you; but to-day I knew you would come here."

"Then," said Rupert, with an appearance of cheerfulness he was far from feeling, "perhaps you also know my intention of proposing your removal to Freilands, either this evening or to-morrow morning?"

"Nothing I should like so much," she cried, starting up eagerly; "let us go."

"I have not slept for several nights," said Melanie, "and am too tired to leave home."

"I fear you are offended with me for what I said just now?" observed Rupert, penitently.

"No; though hearing the truth is sometimes painful enough."

"I ought to have waited until you had recovered from your recent fatigue," he continued. "You have been at the Zorndorffs', I know, since the night of the ball, and by all accounts must have suffered there from more causes than want of rest. People say, *she* was not merely delirious but perfectly mad for several hours; that she called Zorndorff a murderer; said he had killed her child, and would not allow him to approach her."

Cyrilla walked to the window, while Melanie answered: "I cannot imagine how you or any one could have heard that—but it is quite true."

"Is it also true that she said she was not his wife, and

insisted on being carried out of his house?" asked Rupert, with some curiosity.

Melanie blushed, while answering with some hesitation, "Y—es, she said that also."

"But," continued Rupert, "the last part of her story is most probably an invention. Determined that the marvellous should predominate even at her deathbed, it is said that her madness was dispelled altogether, and instantly, by merely looking at a ring which Zorndorff held towards her—a seal-ring in no way remarkable, but which she examined with an attention incomprehensible to those around her, and after he had said a few words in a low voice, she sent every one out of the room, and from that time scarcely spoke to or looked at any one but him."

"The ring," said Melanie, "was one she had given him when they were betrothed, and which she had supposed lost or given away by him. Wiser people than Margaret attach importance to things of that kind."

"I know they do," said Rupert, "and no one more than Zorndorff himself. His wife was ever a sort of mysterious being, and naturally inclined towards everything mystical—in that respect she suited him perfectly."

"In that, but in nothing else!" ejaculated Melanie.

"I suppose," observed Rupert, "the ring led to some satisfactory explanations?"

"Most probably, for though the subject of their long conversation is unknown to me, I heard Edouard making vows that he can now never fulfil, but which served to render her last moments happier, as she said repeatedly, than any part of her previous life."

"It is better for her that she died," said Rupert, thoughtfully; "for Zorndorff was most probably merely yielding to one of those fits of remorse to which, like all men of susceptible feelings and strong passions, he is so subject!"

"I believe it was something better than that," said Melanie; "for I am convinced he would have given his life to save hers at the last; and she was quite conscious of it too. His grief afterwards was frantic, and now he will not believe that she is really dead; says that he has

seen her in the same state before, that it is only asphyxia, or a trance; and he will not allow the slightest preparation for a funeral to be made. Is it not dreadful?"

"I think his doubts very natural," said Rupert, "especially since I heard that an exclamation of his brought her back to life after she was supposed to have expired."

"That is not so uncommon a thing as you seem to imagine," rejoined Melanie. "I am, however, inclined to think that Margaret's spirit was at the time past recall, and that his voice merely brought back the still hovering soul, perhaps at the very moment of separation from the body. A question or two might have enabled me to ascertain the truth of my conjectures, but Edouard would not allow me to approach or speak to her. For the first time in my life, I saw distinctly what may be called the shadow of death—it was as if a gray cloud had passed between her face and the sun, while all around was bright with life and light!"

"And you thought of all that while the unhappy woman was in the agonies of death!" exclaimed Rupert.

"I—I could not help it—I constantly think of such things . . ."

"And imagine you understand them—but you do not, Melanie—such knowledge is too wonderful for you or any one, and will never be attained. Much as I like you, my dear cousin, I sincerely hope that your speculative eye may be far distant from my bed of death. Let us not further discuss a subject so painful as this luckless woman's last moments. I only wanted to ascertain that Zorndorff's grief was genuine—if it be so, Cyrilla, there is hope for us still—do you not think so?" he asked, going to the window where she was standing absently gazing at the fountain in the court.

"No," she answered, in a subdued tone; "I may not hope, and dare not deceive you."

"We shall have time enough to talk of our hopes and fears a few days hence at Freilands," suggested Rupert, looking down compassionately on her relaxed features and glistening eyelashes.

“Speak now,” said Cyrilla; “I know you dislike tears; mine are exhausted for the present, and nothing you may say can make me more wretched than I am, or,” she murmured to herself, “than I deserve to be.”

“Dearest love,” cried Rupert, drawing her towards him, “you altogether mistake me—I merely intended to say, that I feared the death of the Countess Zorndorff would greatly increase our difficulties; but I still hope—may I not hope, Cyrilla?”

She shook her head mournfully.

He bent down and whispered, “You will not marry him?”

Uttering a stifled sob, she covered her face with her hands.

“Cyrilla,” he continued gently, “I have waited more than three months for some explanation of this mysterious connection. Not alone, as your legitimate protector, but as a man who considers himself affianced to you, I demand it now. Let it be without reserve for both our sakes.”

“Oh, Melanie, what can I say to him?” she cried, turning quickly round; but her sister, perhaps fearing an appeal of the kind, had left the room.

“Tell me the true nature of this promise,” said Rupert, “or rather this engagement, for such it must be, and of no common kind either. When, where, how did it take place? Who was present? Have you signed any papers?”

“I have done everything that was weak and foolish,” she answered, despairingly, “and have only the alternative of being his wife, or . . . remaining as I am.”

“Then he cannot annoy you by openly claiming”

“No,” she said, interrupting him, “that trial at least is spared me.”

“You speak so enigmatically, Cyrilla, that I am confirmed in my first supposition of there being some misunderstanding on your part—some misrepresentation on his.”

“O no,” she replied, sorrowfully, “there is not, cannot be anything of the kind, I assure you.”

“I don’t think I can endure this state of uncertainty

much longer," said Rupert, a little impatiently. "Cyrilla, you *must* allow me to interfere now!"

"Not for the universe!" she exclaimed, vehemently. "Death would be preferable to the consequences of your interference! Remember your promise, and oh! Rupert, if you ever loved me"

"If I ever loved you!" he repeated, reproachfully. "I tell you I do love you dearly, devotedly—not like Zorn-dorff; for I believe if I were certain of being able to secure your happiness by resigning you I—would—do—so."

"Then you can, you can," cried Cyrilla. "Resign and—forgive me."

"And *that* will make you happy?"

"As nearly so as I can ever hope to be."

"I did not expect to be taken at my word when I made the offer," said Rupert, with quivering lips; "but I will not retract. You are free."

"And you forgive me, and will love me still?"

"I forgive you" he began, in so constrained a voice, that, supposing him angry, she clasped her hands, and exclaimed passionately: "Indeed, indeed, I did not intend to deceive you. I had hopes, just hopes until now. Oh, Rupert, you are the only real friend left me in the world I cannot dare not tell you this hateful secret but trust me and love me still—if you can."

"Never for a moment doubt my affection," he replied warmly, "or suppose that a want of trust in you made me wish to know your secret. Let us not speak of it again, and I shall endeavour to forget that we have ever had even a conditional engagement."

"And," said Cyrilla, anxiously, "you will be still the same to me but without any engagement or thought of the future? I know your regard is so unselfish that it can bear any test."

"You are trying it severely," said Rupert.

"I regret that it is so," she rejoined, in a low voice; "but you will continue unchanged to me nevertheless—won't you?"

“Tyrant!” he said, forcing a smile. “And how unconscious of your tyranny! Still, there must be some limits put to it, Cyrilla; for, even supposing that I continue to love on without a hope of any kind, you must at least define how much personal freedom you are disposed to grant me.”

“I do not understand”

“I wish to know exactly how much I am engaged to you.”

“Not at all,” said Cyrilla, turning away her head. “I never considered you bound to me in any way.”

“But I did,” said Rupert; “and being so, supposed that I had no right to leave the army, travel, or make any serious change in my mode of life without consulting you.”

“Dear Rupert, you know I have long wished that you should leave the army; and as to any change you may propose, I am sure”

“Halt!” cried Rupert, smiling, “you are unconsciously talking as if we were actually betrothed! Suppose now I were to say—Cyrilla, you have marred my plans of future happiness and usefulness, but to live on in endless hopelessness without any fixed purpose of any kind is too much against my nature to be endured, so, when I have left the army, and the President can no longer be induced to remain at Freilands *I must travel.*”

Cyrilla felt and looked perplexed.

“You do not object? In fact, what could I do better?”

“A great many things,” she answered, eagerly. “You have your marsh to drain, and your village to build—a work of years, as you have told me yourself.”

“But not one that I can accomplish alone; so I have engaged a civil engineer to oversee the works, and have little doubt of being able to induce my former tutor, the Vicar of Windhorst, to undertake the management of the colony during my absence.”

“And have you already forgotten the infant school and children’s hospital we have talked so much about?” said Cyrilla, reproachfully.

“Those plans must be given up for the present. Without a woman’s advice and assistance”

“But,” cried Cyrilla, quickly, “I am quite as ready as ever to advise and assist you.”

“And for how long?” asked Rupert. “Can I forget that three months hence, instead of remaining here with me, as I had hoped, you will probably go to Aix-la-Chapelle with the President? Have I not already heard of a journey to Milan, and a visit to Fernanda?”

“But you could go with us. Melanie would be delighted, I am sure.”

“Very possibly; but Fernanda might not be equally so, therefore Italy is out of the question. When you are at Milan, I may perhaps go to Jerusalem.”

“And why there?”

“In order to see something new. The Holy Land and Egypt are fashionable countries just now, and have become the usual resort of gentlemen in my situation.”

“What *do* you mean?”

“I mean that disappointed men travel in the East, get a fever at Smyrna, are reported dead, and return home cured of their hopeless passions!”

Cyrilla turned away from him, observing almost indignantly, “Melanie was right—you cannot be serious—love is a mere pastime to you!”

“It has proved rather a dismal one lately,” he answered.

“Our present painful position,” she continued, “is, to say the least, an ill-chosen subject for jesting.”

“Very,” said Rupert; “I wish you would suppose me quite serious, and give me leave to travel for three or four years.”

Cyrilla was silent.

“You consent?”

“Not if you allow me to refuse.”

“Refuse by all means; it will prove clearly and at once that this plan of yours will never answer for either of us.”

“Oh, yes, it will. Let me persuade Melanie to give up the journey to Italy, and we can all remain at Exfort for

the winter; but, perhaps," she added, hesitatingly, "perhaps you will consider this too great a sacrifice."

"I am afraid I must confess that it is none at all," answered Rupert, smiling; "parting from you on any terms would have been intolerably painful to me, and, as you say, I have employment enough and of all kinds here. A good many of my buildings will be roofed before Christmas, and the workmen can get on with the interiors during the cold weather. I shall have the society to which I have been accustomed, as my regiment will still be quartered at Exfort. The shooting at Freilands is excellent, and there must be famous skating on the lake in January!"

Cyrilla sighed deeply; she saw that an effort would be made to banish her from his thoughts, and feared the diversity of occupations might soon enable him to dispense with her society altogether. "It seems," she observed, after a pause, "you rather enjoy the idea of a continuation of your garçon life?"

"It was not what I wished or intended," said Rupert, "but you command, and I obey. By the bye, how long is this singular compact of loving indefinitely to continue?"

"On my part—for ever," replied Cyrilla, gravely.

"That is long," said Rupert, equally seriously. "Suppose, however, in consideration of our mortality, we were to name a time—say a score of years?"

"As you please," she answered, with difficulty restraining her tears at what she supposed the sarcasm of his words.

"At the end of twenty years," continued Rupert, "we shall have arrived at what the French politely call *un âge mûr*. Do you not think it possible that before that time Zorndorff may voluntarily release you from vows the fulfilment of which he cannot enforce?"

"Perhaps so," she answered, thoughtfully; "Melanie seemed to think, from what she overheard him say to Margaret, that had she lived all would have ended well. It was my last hope—could he have satisfied *her*, I should have had nothing more to desire."

“Another enigma!” said Rupert, shrugging his shoulders, but his sanguine temperament grasping instantly at even a shadow of hope, he added, “Let us see what the next three months will bring us; and in the mean time, I promise to love you still with all my heart and soul. Your so earnestly requesting me to do so is the strongest proof you could have given me that the engagement between you and Zorndorff is of a less serious nature than you have lately led me to suppose.”

Unconscious of the overwhelming reproach contained in his last words, Rupert turned towards Melanie, who just then appeared at the door, and began to upbraid her for having made her escape just when they most wanted her.

Cyrilla’s marriage had been of so dreamlike a description, that, though forced by circumstances to feel the legal importance of the act, the moral obligations had been very nearly forgotten in the anger caused by Zorndorff’s desertion, and the scorn produced by the baseness of his motives. Some doubts of having a right to bestow her heart on her kind-hearted cousin had, it is true, occasionally disturbed her peace of mind, but the fallacious hopes continually held out to her by Zorndorff had removed her scruples as fast as they rose. Rupert’s last words to her were like a flash of lightning, showing the precipice on which she stood, but throwing no light on the path that would lead her from it.

Let not those to whom trials of a somewhat similar nature are unknown, condemn her; still less those who, surrounded by all that ought to keep their regard fixed on the man to whom they have pledged their faith, nevertheless err mentally as Cyrilla did! The worthiest of the latter could not condemn themselves more instantaneously and completely than the unhappy victim of Zorndorff’s villany, as she now stood beside her cousin; his low eager conversation with her sister unheeded, and even the constant repetition of her own name failing to attract her attention, until Melanie, taking her hand, appealed to her in words that seemed to hiss in her ears: “Cyrilla, for Heaven’s sake consider what you are doing! A compact of this kind is now actual madness—think of the jealousy,

hatred, ungovernable anger that you will provoke—remember what the consequences may be to us all!”

Rupert, who was about to leave the room, paused, looked back, and watched Cyrilla's changing colour with anxiety.

“Stay, Rupert,” she faltered, “stay—listen to Melanie—she is right—you were right—it cannot be . . .”

“Had Margaret lived,” continued Melanie, fully aware that then or never would it be possible to break an agreement so fraught with danger to them all, “had Margaret lived, it might have been otherwise; but now Edouard is free, and, as soon as propriety permits, will undoubtedly endeavour to repair the error which a combination of untoward circumstances forced him to commit.”

Cyrilla's eyes flashed. “Melanie, you try my temper beyond endurance by speaking in this manner,” she said, indignantly, “An *error* do you call such unprincipled selfishness—such . . .”

Rupert advanced quickly towards her. Cyrilla paused a moment, and then added, rapidly, “The past cannot be remedied, the future is still partly mine, and the proposal, which as a matter of course he will make a few months hence, I shall refuse without one moment's hesitation. You will oblige me by telling him so, should he consult you.”

“I shall do no such thing. Dear Cyrilla, think of what you are saying.”

“Oh, I have thought enough and suffered enough, too. His conduct has been so despicable, his motives have been so sordid, that I scarcely know whether I most scorn or abhor him!”

“I did not think her capable of such violence,” said Melanie, turning to Rupert, who was listening attentively to every word, and watching every movement.

“She is an Adlerkron, and eloquent in anger,” he observed, unable to conceal the pleasure which her last words gave him; “but it will not last long—see, it is past already.”

It seemed to be so. The whole expression of Cyrilla's countenance changed as she turned to Rupert; and, laying

her hand on his arm, said slowly, and with evident effort, "It was wrong—selfish of me to wish to bind you in any way. I have no right to control you . . . no claim to your regard beyond what is due to me—as your cousin."

"But I give you a right, and admit that claim, and all others, too," he said, putting his arm round her. "I am yours to dispose of as you please. There is no sacrifice I am not ready to make if it in any way promote your happiness. Do you believe me?"

As she looked up to him, tears fell from his eyes upon her forehead, and the words she was about to utter were stifled in a passionate burst of grief.

"There now," he said, endeavouring to speak in his usual cheerful manner; "don't cry about it any more. Never think of me at all, but do and say whatever you like from this time forward; I shall have no right to complain after having given you full power to tyrannize to any extent you may think proper."

"Oh, Rupert . . . from my tyranny you have nothing more to fear . . . I am not likely ever again to forget my unfortunate . . ."

"I wish you would forget it, and let me see you cheerful and happy again," he said quickly, as he gathered up his warlike accoutrements, and hurried out of the room.

"Would that he were less sensible, and had more sensibility!" ejaculated Melanie, as she drew her handkerchief across her eyes. "Even when acting magnanimously—nobly—he spoils all by speaking commonly and jocosely. What perversion!"

"Rather say—What perfection!" cried Cyrilla, warmly. "Can you not perceive that his motives for so doing are to diminish the sense of obligation? How differently would he act were he in Edouard's place!—What do I say? He never could have been in such a position: the first dereliction from the right path would have been impossible to one so honourable."

"Perhaps so," said Melanie; "but, in charity, bestow some pity on Edouard now—he is suffering beyond all you can imagine."

"He has cause," murmured Cyrilla, thoughtfully.

"You blame him for his wife's death, I know," continued Melanie, "but unjustly. As you saw her that night, I have seen her repeatedly in the course of a single day. It is better that she died; no efforts of his could ever have made life other than a burden to her."

"There are few lives," said Cyrilla, "could they be minutely foreseen, to which an early death would not be preferable, especially when we reflect that those who die young ever leave an image of youth, and beauty, and supposed excellence, on the mind of the survivors."

"I believe you are right," said Melanie. "One thing is certain, that the older we grow, the more unwilling we are to leave this world. When a child, death had no terrors; fears during illness were unknown to me: at a later period, I rather enjoyed a dangerous illness, as it enabled me to see the strength of my father's affection; a time followed when I would willingly have died—when, my fondest hopes blighted, and compelled by circumstances to marry a man of whom I felt an unconquerable dread—life had lost all charms for me! Yet by degrees I became accustomed to the comfortable monotony of my destiny,—and now . . . now that the most desirable period of my woman's existence is past—now I begin to value life for itself, feel alarmed at illness, think of death as a terrible necessity, and can even imagine that clinging to this world experienced by the aged, often most strongly when nothing but vitality remains of all that had made life a blessing."

At this moment the President's heavy step was heard approaching through the adjoining rooms, and Melanie suddenly stopped with a shrinking motion and raising of the shoulders, a habit which she had acquired to hide embarrassment, but which eminently served to betray it. Cyrilla drew a piece of work towards her, over which she bent, to hide the traces of recent grief. Useless care: the drooping mouth and crimson lips, the brimful eyelids, ready to overflow when they could do so unperceived, the listless attitude,—all became evident at a glance to a man who had his own reasons for watching the effect that his niece's death would produce upon her. He was surprised,

perplexed; and his scrutinizing eyes still rested on her while he addressed his wife.

“Melanie, you have more influence than most people with Edouard,—go to him, and, if possible, induce him to consent to his wife’s interment. Every physician within twenty miles round Exfort has pronounced her dead. The symptoms which have given him the idea that she still lives are by no means so uncommon as he supposes; and a continuance of his present state of excitement may seriously affect his health, if not his mind.”

“But,” said Melanie, hesitatingly, “would it not be better to wait until there is some outward sign of decay? The idea of any one being buried alive is the most horrible imaginable!”

“Undoubtedly,” rejoined the President, “and it is the duty of the survivors to take every possible precaution. About an hour ago, I tried to persuade Edouard to consent to an incision being made in Margaret’s foot, hoping by that means to convince him of her decease, but . . .”

“That would not satisfy me,” cried Melanie, interrupting him; “I read lately an account of the exhumation of skeletons in an old churchyard, and it was discovered that a considerable number of them were turned upon their faces, which proved that the miserable beings had recovered sufficient consciousness to make a struggle for life . . . O, Wilhelm, I wish you would promise to have some mortal wound inflicted on my body before you consign it to the grave!”

“Rather let me exact such a promise from you,” said the President, smiling; “I am five-and-twenty years your senior, and in the course of nature . . .”

“Promise,” cried Melanie, eagerly. “You do not like speaking of death, and I may not again have an opportunity of making the request.”

Cyrilla looked up: she expected some ironical remark; but her brother-in-law appeared grave and thoughtful, as he answered: “I promise it; and should you survive me, do the same. Try now your powers of persuasion to the same effect on Edouard, about whom I feel extremely uneasy.”



CHAPTER XXXIX.



HE remains of the Countess Zorndorff, after having formed the sole topic of conversation in Exfort for several days, were at length consigned to the grave and consequent forgetfulness. The President, Melanie, and Cyrilla removed to Freilands, and the Bellegardes to their immediate vicinity; the bourgeois proprietor of a large white-faced house, called Neuhof, having been induced for a consideration to place mansion, meadows, and young plantations at their disposition for the summer months. Openly avowing that the neighbourhood of Freilands, and no rural or rustic inclinations, had induced them to occupy this abode, they directly after their establishment there requested Rupert to have a gate made in the high wooden fence which separated them from his deer park, and a well-gravelled walk from it to his house.

Virginie was the only person not quite satisfied with these arrangements; she felt that she had no plausible excuse for remaining any longer at Freilands, and prepared to leave with a degree of reluctance that astonished Melanie and provoked Cyrilla. Rupert, however, no sooner perceived it than he began to urge her to remain with them, observing that "the rehearsals would soon begin at their little theatre, when it would be necessary for them to be together every day; that if obliged to make appointments with her he was quite sure he should never keep them, although they *had* so many duets to study; that Alphonse's comfort and health were worth her considera-

tion, and it would be just as well that the little fellow should not be cuffed and teased by the Bellegarde children until he was stronger ; and then he appealed to Melanie and Cyrilla for corroboration. The former said what she imagined necessary to satisfy him, the latter was perfectly silent ; yet Virginie, still pretending to hesitate, allowed Rupert to urge, reason with, and laugh at her for a very considerable length of time before she consented, contriving to do so at last, as if conferring the greatest possible favour on him.

“ It is much better that she stay with us,” said Rupert, addressing Cyrilla after Virginie had left them ; “ I should have been preciously inconvenienced by rehearsals at stated hours every day. I wish I could get off altogether now, as your refusal of this part has spoiled, as far as I am personally concerned, all the pleasure I expected from these theatricals.”

“ I hope not,” replied Cyrilla, with some embarrassment ; yet she found it impossible to repress a feeling of satisfaction that it was so. Considering it her duty henceforward to avoid everything that would bring her in immediate contact or communication with Rupert, she had declined the part assigned her in the opera about to be performed ; and this her first effort had caused her a mixture of pain, irritation, and regret, that she found hard to endure with patience. It was at least a sort of consolation to her that Rupert openly avowed his disappointment ; and for the twentieth time she listened to his covert reproaches with pleasure, vainly endeavouring to repress the feeling, and proving her sense of its selfishness by the effort to conceal it.

“ I doubt Cyrilla’s being able to play that part as well as Virginie,” observed Melanie. “ All the Lindesmars are perfect actresses.”

“ I know they are. I have often played with them, and have no objection to do so again ; but it was the rehearsals and practisings with Cyrilla that . . . However, there is no use in talking about it any more. One subject of mutual interest—one means of enjoying her society

without interruption for some hours every day—is still left, and shall be put in practice this very present time. Cyrilla, you shall have your first lesson in riding to-day !”

She acquiesced, and left the room to put on her habit.

While Rupert gave the necessary directions, and afterwards, with a sort of pleased impatience, waited for her appearance, he little suspected that he was putting not only her fortitude, but her affection, to the severest test. Essentially timid, the vague wish to learn to ride, which she had expressed one evening in the Circus, faded before the dreaded reality of trusting herself to a powerful, spirited animal, accustomed to the practised steady hand of a perfect rider. But what could she do? Rupert had purchased the horse for her; had taken the trouble himself to learn from Madame Vinci how to instruct her; and, in the innocence of her heart, she estimated this latter effort of kindness higher than it perhaps justly deserved. After having refused to take a part in his favourite opera, and every day finding some excuse to avoid going with him to his marsh, could she decline riding, which he evidently desired more than anything else? No—ride she must; and he should never know that she was afraid! With a trepidation which her maid mistook for eagerness, she dressed; and, hurrying through the hall, stood beside Rupert, looking very pale and very pretty,—her slight figure appearing still slighter from the dark-coloured, closely-fitting habit, and the absence of those starched under-garments which, flounced and furbelowed, usually give such amazing amplitude to the “female form divine.”

Two grooms stood at Selim’s head; a third caressed him in the most flattering manner, in order to induce him to remain perfectly quiet while Cyrilla learned to mount. She listened with great attention to her cousin’s directions, but her thoughts were too confused to understand them, and she consequently fell back repeatedly on his shoulder in a way that rather surprised yet did not displease him in the least. He laughed a little; and then, angry with herself for exhibiting so much awkwardness, she made a violent spring, slipped on the saddle, and disappeared altogether at the other side of the horse. It was then Rupert’s turn

to feel alarmed ; and he became so to a degree by no means uncommon in such circumstances. He raised her to the saddle, and held her there, while Selim was being led very carefully backwards and forwards before the house ; his own fear of an accident preventing him from observing the raised shoulders, stooping form, and pallid parted lips of the trembling equestrian.

A good rider from his earliest youth, and dauntless if not daring by nature, Rupert could form no idea of the tortures of timidity as far as his own person was concerned : for the first time in his life he was destined to feel them for Cyrilla. Every curvet of Selim's, and they were not a few, made him throw his arm round her, and stammer in the explanations he was giving about the curb, which, in all the unconsciousness of perfect ignorance, she pulled and twisted in a barbarous manner. Perceiving at length his anxiety, her self-possession returned, and with it a certain proportion of courage ; so that when Melanie appeared on the balcony, she began to sit upright ; and a distant view of Virginie was sufficient to make her whisper to Rupert that, "if he mounted, she thought she could now get on famously." He did so ; and, preceded by one groom, followed by another, and with his hand on Selim's bridle, they moved slowly and cautiously down the lime-tree avenue towards the forest.

The balcony was crowded with visitors, the President standing in the portico beneath, when Cyrilla gaily cantered up to the door on her return home.

"Why, this is an astonishing beginning !" cried the President, advancing to assist her to dismount. "I did not expect to see you ride in that way for six weeks at least, and should not have been surprised had a single trial sufficed to disgust you with such rough exercise. One never knows," he added, turning to Rupert, "what these women can do until they are tried ! You look infinitely more heated and tired than she does."

"I dare say," said Rupert, laughing, "for I have been suffering every possible gradation, from uneasiness to actual fear. Prepared to find Cyrilla rather timid than otherwise, she absolutely terrified me by her recklessness !"

And this was perfectly true. Surprised and pleased at Rupert's anxiety and excessive care of her, Cyrilla first wished to re-assure, then to astonish him. A lurking desire to obtain some of the same kind of admiration which he had bestowed so unreservedly on Madame Vinci succeeded; and for this purpose she feigned, then to her infinite amazement actually felt, a temerity foreign to her character, and was with difficulty prevented from turning into one of the reclaimed fields near the marsh, in order to leap the drains! Let it not be supposed that, with all the facility of a heroine of romance, Cyrilla had learned to ride in the course of a couple of hours. Such was by no means the case. On the contrary, there was all the unsteadiness of a beginner in movement and posture. She was frequently thrown wildly about on her saddle, sat considerably to the left side, made most unnecessary use of her stirrup, and was altogether as awkward as any one so naturally graceful could be; nor, though she succeeded in concealing her fears, were they by any means completely subdued. There were times when she expected that Selim's next spring would cast her to the ground; others, when a slightly bounding gallop deprived her of breath, and gave her a sensation of being on the edge of a precipice. Yet even then she urged him forward, dashing on with a heedlessness that might have passed for courage, had it not too strongly resembled temerity. Such Rupert evidently considered it; but the more he attempted to restrain, the more rash she became; and at length he rode on beside her in a state of excitement little inferior to her own, and with precisely the same indefinite dread of some dangerous accident in perspective.

But nothing of the kind occurred either that day or any of the following, and then Rupert's cautions and fears changed into encouragements and openly expressed approbation. Cyrilla was soon a graceful and intrepid rider; any qualms of timidity which may have assailed her were so successfully checked, so perfectly controlled, that they remained undiscovered, and at last they ceased altogether, were completely absorbed, as any feeling may be by another and stronger; for these rides soon became the only means

of undisturbed intercourse, the last remaining bond of union, between her and that cousin whose attentions she had herself forbidden, and who was now from circumstances obliged to obey her commands more literally than she liked, or ever perhaps intended.

Rupert's mornings were claimed unreservedly by his steward, the civil engineer, and numerous workmen employed in draining the marsh; latterly also still more by an architect who was inspecting the building of model cottages, a church, and school-house for the already populous village, the inhabitants of which, still living in temporary huts so little calculated for winter use, that buildings and builders had become of immense importance; and Rupert's mind was soon so occupied and interested on such subjects, that not only morning hours, but even after riding with Cyrilla in the afternoon, he might be seen day after day rushing down to the lake, on which soon after a long narrow boat became visible, gliding swiftly in the direction of the river. Cyrilla sighed—Virginie frowned, bit her lip, tapped with her foot, exhibited every symptom of ladylike impatience imaginable, then generally sent for her child, and went off to her sister at Neuhof, where, vexed and dispirited, she complained incessantly of Rupert's continued indifference. Adrienne listened at first with interest and sympathy, but at length got tired; and one day, with an impatient shrug of her shoulders, observed that "she had foreseen and foretold that it would be so—Rupert never had been, never would be, capable of the devotion to be found in other men—that if Virginie were married to him to-morrow, she would discover the day after that his copper mines, woods, plantations, moors, his regiment, or even a shooting-match, would all supersede her in his thoughts."

"No," persisted Virginie; "I am convinced that, if once married, his wife would be his first object—that she would be the most fortunate of women!"

"O, I have no doubt he would be good-natured and generous," rejoined Adrienne, "would pay long bills without looking at or wondering about them. I admit he is altogether so desirable that I should encourage you to

persevere if I did not consider the case quite hopeless. Now Henri thinks it would be better, all things considered, if you could make up your mind about General Kersdorff—he is not young or handsome, but . . .”

“Don’t speak of him,” cried Virginie, impatiently. “You know I only tolerate him when I am trying to make Rupert jealous.”

“Rupert jealous! What an idea! Really, Virginie, for a clever woman you are wonderfully dull on some subjects. Why, scarcely a day passes in the course of which you do not in some way or other let him know how completely devoted to him you are, and then you expect him to be jealous!”

“I assure you,” cried Virginie, quickly; “I have not once, since I have been at Freilands, said a word that . . .”

“Say! Of course not. What can a woman *say*? but your looks and manners express more than many words; and Henri is greatly amused at the quiet way in which Rupert receives the incense you offer him.”

“Henri is always unkind in his observations, merciless in his judgment of me.”

“He thinks you are very deep, and says I cannot fathom you.”

A slightly ironical smile played round Virginie’s lips at this remark, the justness of which she felt so completely, that she suddenly became desirous of knowing more of her brother-in-law’s opinions. “I suppose,” she said, after a pause, “I suppose he disapproved of my remaining at Freilands after you came here?”

“He thought it a strong measure, and hoped you would manage with your usual tact; for he more than suspected that not only Cyrilla, but even dear Melanie herself, when not actually writing verses, perceived your . . . your . . .”

“My what?”

“Your . . . manœuvres.”

“You may tell him, Adrienne, that had *he* been less disagreeable to me I should have returned to his house—that instead of manœuvring, as he supposes, I have been quite explicit with Rupert, who knows perfectly well that Henri

and I disagree, and almost dislike each other. Impropriety there was none in my remaining at Freilands, when Melanie herself said”

“O, as to that,” cried Madame de Bellegarde, carelessly; “I must say I think all scruples about Rupert’s house, or Rupert’s self, extremely ridiculous as far as we are concerned; but Henri never can be made to understand the nature of an intimacy commenced in childhood, and continued without intermission through life. Such intimacies have their advantages, no doubt, but also their disadvantages. Only imagine Rupert taking me aside yesterday evening, and telling me I ought to send Hortense to school; that she would be completely spoiled if I kept her at home; and was already an astounding coquette for her years!”

“Nonsense!”

“Fact, I assure you. I was dreadfully offended at first, for though Rupert did not in direct words say it, I could perceive that he considered my example and a all that sort of thing, you know but afterwards I was obliged to laugh when he produced an execrably written French note from her, in which she proposed a *rendezvous* with him at the Deer-Park gate; she wished so much that he would row her on the lake! Did you ever hear any thing so amusing?”

“You consider this matter too lightly,” observed Virginie, slightly contracting her brows.

“Why that is only half the affair, and as Rupert said, would have appeared quite natural, and made no impression whatever on him, had she not previously, with great mystery, and some real or affected embarrassment, bestowed on him an ell or two of red ribbon, and a lock of her hair! It seems he returned these precious gifts, and probably lectured her”

“As she deserved, I hope,” cried Virginie, severely.

“Perhaps more—for, after crying profusely for some time, she told him in excuse or justification, I really do not remember which he called it, ‘that mamma often walked with Klemmhein in the park, and had given him a gold pencil-case, and’—In short, it was quite evident that

Mademoiselle Joubert had talked of me more than was necessary, and had, moreover, neglected her duties as governess in a most unpardonable manner—No *femme de chambre* ever wrote more incorrectly than Hortense; and though I did not say so to Rupert, I know that her attempts in German are still worse. He quite brought me round to his opinion at last—She certainly is very ignorant, and . . . and . . . remarkably tall for her age; so I promised to use all my influence with Henri to have her sent to some famous *pension* at Strasburg.”

“Strasburg! and why there?”

“The best place for learning French and German equally well—or ill—as the case may be; but it seems that Melanie made all sorts of inquiries about the school three years ago, when Rupert placed a god-daughter of his there.”

“A god-daughter! I never heard of his having such an appendage,” observed Virginie.

“O, he has a godson too, his tutor’s children—all right and proper. I remember Melanie telling me something long ago about his having deposited a sum of money somewhere for their education; so that if he should by chance break his neck or be drowned . . .”

“Adrienne, for goodness’ sake don’t talk in that light way!”

“Rupert’s own words, I assure you; but Melanie supposed he made the arrangement to put an end to the letters of thanks perpetually written to him by the children when their bills were paid. It was just what one might expect from him; you know he is such a dear creature about things of that kind; and, indeed, even when he preaches propriety, he does it in an off-hand, worldly-wise, intelligible sort of way, that is, at least, very enduring. I do not know any one whose advice I should more willingly ask were I in any kind of dilemma . . . By the bye, have you heard again from that inexorable *marchande de modes* at Turin?”

“No. Her shameless bill hangs like the sword of Damocles over my head, and I dread the post-hour on account of it.”

"It would have been better to have sent it with the others to your father-in-law," said Adrienne.

"Impossible," replied Virginie, shaking her head; "only just imagine an old man, who has spent a quiet life in the country, poring over a thing of that kind: besides, it is a sort of double concern, her husband being jeweller and money-lender, or rather a usurer, to whom in my distress I was obliged to apply; he cheated me most unscrupulously, even in the first instance scarcely giving me more than half the money of the loans placed to my account; and these loans, with the accumulated interest, now amount to a sum of which my father-in-law would undoubtedly dispute the payment, and I should fall in his esteem, without a chance of relief from my difficulties."

"Have you never thought" began Madame de Bellegarde, sedulously rubbing a spot on her glove with her handkerchief, "of applying to Rupert you know his unhesitating"

"No, no, no, no," cried Virginie, quickly, "anything rather than that! I thought of asking Victor to assist me. Grandpapa is liberal to him, though not to us."

"Why, Virginie, have you forgotten that Victor has been six months in Paris? That he is living, and must continue to live, at an expensive hotel here, until he is placed somewhere or other definitively, of which, too, at present there seems but little chance?"

"I know all that, but he is prudent, and always has money it would be merely a loan, you know"

"Yes; but one that might inconvenience him, whereas Rupert would consider it a trifle not worth talking or thinking about."

"It is not a trifle," said Virginie, in a low voice; "I only confessed part of the sum to you."

"Virginie!"

"You need not look so horrified; I think the woman might perhaps be satisfied with the half in the way of part payment, and wait my convenience for the rest. I have written to beg of her to give me a little more time; but there is little chance of her doing so when she hears that

my father-in-law has paid all our other creditors. I am really very unfortunate—most unhappy!”

“I should not have thought so during the rehearsal yesterday.”

“Of course not,” said Virginie, “nor afterwards either. I don’t choose to disgust Rupert with a sorrowful countenance. Nothing he dislikes so much.”

“I am not quite so sure of that,” said Madame de Bellegarde, musingly.

“But I am,” rejoined Virginie; “I know it makes him quite uncomfortable seeing any one he likes looking ill or unhappy, and if he cannot remove the cause of their sorrow, he avoids them.”

“He does not avoid Cyrilla,” said Madame de Bellegarde; “and I never saw any one looking so perfectly unhappy as she does; but perhaps he thinks he can remove the cause, and in that case”

“No—I don’t—think—he can,” answered Virginie, slowly; “I am myself scarcely able to account for it now. Her grief about Margaret’s death I should have considered a good piece of acting, had it not lasted so long, and had she not really endeavoured to conceal it in every possible way. I can only suppose that either she imagines the poor thing was wronged and ill-treated on her account, or that perhaps she herself has now ceased to care for Zorn-dorff, and rather dreads than wishes a renewal of his attentions. I have often lately feared it might be so.”

“Not at all improbable,” said Madame de Bellegarde; “for my part, I almost think her disinterested and romantic enough to prefer Victor to every one else.”

“O that I were sure of that!” exclaimed Virginie, clasping her hands and looking upwards; “but I fear, I greatly fear, she merely tolerates our poor brother. Come, Alphonse,” she added, turning to her child, “come, it is time for us to go home—*home!* Would that Freilands were indeed our home!”

“I wish it were,” said Madame de Bellegarde. “How nice it would be, could we arrange everything after the fashion of the last act of a comedy—you and Rupert with

joined hands; General Kersdorff, after a moment's natural hesitation, offers his to Julie, who of course accepts it joyfully; Henri discovers that I am an angel, entreats forgiveness for his unjust suspicions, ridiculous jealousy, and so forth"

"And Cyrilla?" asked Virginie, laughing.

"O, as to Victor and Cyrilla, they are both young—can wait, and might do better. Let us leave them out of our play altogether."

"I wish we could do so as easily in life as in our theatre," said Virginie. "I suppose you have heard that Cyrilla has also refused to take a part in the melodrama written for us by Melanie? Rupert looked so disappointed, that I offered my services directly, though I dislike Melanïe's florid language and weak plot beyond all expression."

"Well, do you know I thought it all very nice and pretty, the evening Cyrilla read it to us," said Madame de Bellegarde, "and you seemed to like it too."

"I liked Cyrilla's reading, which would have made a worse thing appear tolerable."

"Ah—to be sure—it may have been that—I never heard any one read so before, and was quite astonished at her courage. I am sure I couldn't do it."

"I dare say not—few people can—but it was not quite so admirable and astonishing as the President and Rupert seemed to think; it was absurd their saying they preferred reading even to singing as an accomplishment."

"Why, it has its advantages," said Madame de Bellegarde, looking unusually wise and speaking rather didactically; "it is less noisy in the acquirement and practice, is independent of accompanying instruments, modulates the voice for ordinary speaking, and"

"Quite true, dear Adrienne," said Virginie, endeavouring to suppress a smile, "but I have heard all that before, you know, from Melanie. Be sure to have Hortense taught to read at Strasburg."

"Taught!"

"Of course. Surely you did not imagine that any one

could read as Cyrilla does, by inspiration? She has had the best instruction that could be obtained; and when one considers all the advantages she has had, it is astonishing after all to find her so common-place a person."

"O, Virginie!"

"I assure you I think so, and cannot discover what people find to admire in her, especially now when she will not sing, says she cannot make any more amusing sketches, and does not even assist at our theatricals or tableaux. She makes up for all to Rupert, however, by pretending to take an interest in the buildings that are being erected near that ugly bog. I wish you could see her studying the plans, and gathering up the words of wisdom as they fall from the lips of that most terrific man the President."

"Are you also afraid of him?" asked Madame de Bellegarde.

"Beyond measure: he is even more cynical and severe than his nephew, without the personal beauty and strong feelings that so nearly cover the multitude of Zorndorff's sins; to say nothing of his having at least the one excellent quality of never interfering with other people's purposes, unless they absolutely cross his own; while the President, either consciously or unconsciously, is perpetually marring any little innocent plots that may be going on around him. Had it not been for his cold scrutinizing glances, I should have got up a mania for marshes to please Rupert long ago."

The sisters looked at each other, and laughed merrily.

"*Allons, Alphonse,*" cried Virginie, raising her child from the ground, "*Courons, mon enfant,* that we may have time to make ourselves pretty for dinner."

"Make ourselves pretty?" repeated the child.

"The President," said Virginie, looking back with a toss of the head, "would tell me to endeavour to give my son habits of punctuality, instead of instilling the poison of personal vanity into his young mind. It is agreeable to have to listen to speeches of that kind continually, without daring to answer them; but a time may come, when even Rupert's presence will not impose silence on me!"



CHAPTER XL.

WHEN Virginie, a couple of hours later, with a good deal of affected haste, entered the drawing-room at Freilands, expecting to see the President comparing his watch with the different clocks that in various forms adorned the rooms, she was surprised to find Melanie, quite alone, waiting to receive the guests expected from Exfort, for the purpose of joining in the full rehearsal of the opera, which was to take place in the course of the evening. Her practised jealous eye had scarcely had time to discover all that was new and tasteful in her companion's dress, before her brother, Victor de Lindesmar, and a number of people arrived; and Melanie began to excuse Rupert's absence, by saying, that he had persuaded the President to inspect his improvements, and give an opinion about a road which he purposed making through the bog to the village—a much pleasanter way of reaching it than in a boat, and of very great importance to the inhabitants. Then followed a long discussion about roads and bogs in general, which so little interested Virginie, that, beckoning her brother, she walked out into the balcony, and wondered what *could* have induced the President to forget the dinner-hour.

“It seems,” said Victor de Lindesmar, “he persuaded Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron to go with them, and I can easily imagine her making people forget both time and place.”

“Nevertheless,” rejoined Virginie, “the dirt, damp, and fog will, I suppose, remind them at last that they are in a

bog. I hate the place—and even the words marsh or moorlands. One hears of nothing, from morning till night, but drainage and irrigation, sluices and canals, turf-dust, and peat-compressing machines !”

“Very engrossing subjects of conversation,” said her brother, “when one has a personal interest in the business, and even, as a matter of speculation or curiosity, by no means uninteresting either. I am sorry I refused Adlerkron’s invitation to go with him to-day ; when I did so, I had not the least idea that his cousin was to be of the party.”

“So he asked you to go with him ?” said Virginie, thoughtfully. “Could he have intended you to take care of Cyrilla while he talked to the President ?”

“I believe that such may have been his very kind intentions, and therefore the more regret my refusal ; but she has so invariably remained with her sister lately, that I never doubted I should find her in the rose room, and be permitted to accompany them to the garden, and afterwards sit under the trees in the lawn as usual.”

“So this affair with Cyrilla is really getting serious, Victor ?”

“Quite so, I assure you. Directly I have commenced my career, no matter how subordinate my situation, I intend to write to my grandfather.”

“You had better first speak to her,” observed Virginie.

“I expect to have but few difficulties to encounter in that quarter,” answered her brother, with a satisfied smile ; for with that pleasing appreciation of self, not uncommon in men of his age—perhaps of any age—he had mistaken Cyrilla’s politeness for regard ; her careless toleration of attentions, to which she was accustomed from every one, to an especial encouragement of his own views. “I only wish I were as sure of my grandfather’s consent,” he added, after a moment’s pause ; “for I greatly fear that he and my mother, after the manner of provident parents, have already found out some unexceptionable *partie* for me in the neighbourhood of Amboise.”

“So,” said Virginie, hesitatingly, “you only fear diffi-

culties from grandpapa, and have never had cause to suppose that . . . Cyrilla . . . cares . . . for Rupert?"

"To be sure she cares for him, as everybody who knows him must—he is the best-natured fellow in the world: not at all to be feared as a rival, however, as he has not time at present to be even respectably attentive to any woman—least of all to a cousin! And I, you know, have holidays now—no sort of occupation but to make myself agreeable."

"Very true," said Virginie, "and Cyrilla certainly does talk to you . . . or rather listen to you talking—sometimes—often in fact . . . and though not always attentive . . ."

"Ah, here she comes," cried Victor de Lindesmar, leaning over the balustrade, and bowing repeatedly, in a vain endeavour to attract the attention of the three people who were advancing quickly towards the house in eager conversation. "How charming—how interesting she looks."

"The black mud on her dress does look rather interesting," said Virginie, laughing; "perhaps you also admire the unconcern with which she exhibits her boots incrustated with dirt and powdered with fresh dust?"

"I do—I do," cried Victor, warmly; "it is precisely that unconcern—that carelessness, which makes her so irresistible."

"I'm sure *I* have no objection to your finding her so," murmured Virginie.

"She forms such a contrast to all the other women I have ever known," he continued.

"I don't think you know much about her," said Virginie with some pique, for she imagined there was a slight reproach in her brother's words.

"Do I not?" he rejoined, quickly; "then if you do, it is your duty to tell me; and if your words have any particular meaning, I must insist on . . ."

At this moment Cyrilla looked up, smiled, and playfully shaking her soiled dress, hurried into the house, followed by Rupert, but not before he had flourished his straw hat in the air towards Virginie, and pointed to the President,

who was looking at his watch with a mixture of astonishment and dismay.

The rehearsal was like all such affairs at amateur theatres, a matter of pleasure, not business. There was a good deal of jesting and laughing, flirting and mocking; some good acting and very tolerable singing, but to the surprise of all who were not inmates of Freilands, it was proved beyond a doubt that Rupert, though acknowledged to be the best musician of the party, did not know his part. He laughingly accused Virginie of having neglected to practise with him: she retorted that his whole time had been latterly divided between his marsh and rides with his cousin; and then he promised to devote the fortnight which still intervened before the grand representation took place to the study of his duets with her.

Mr. and Madame de Bellegarde, the President, and Melanie, left the stage box, where they had been amused and by no means silent spectators of all that had been said and sung. Count Lindesmar prepared to follow them, but stopped when he perceived that Cyrilla showed no inclination to move.

Virginie had walked up the now open stage with Rupert to a large window at the back of the house; and though apparently drawn towards it merely to look at the calm summer night's sky, they continued to stand there talking while all the others dispersed to return to the cheerful rooms and tea that awaited them below stairs.

"Do you wish to see the effect of the moonlight entering through that window after the lamps are extinguished?" asked Victor de Lindesmar, leaning over the front of the box, and following the direction of Cyrilla's eyes.

She murmured something about her cousin and his sister looking as if they were just going to perform some interesting scene together.

"I don't know much of Adlerkron's talents that way," said Lindesmar, laughing; "but that Virginie is acting now as much as she has been doing for the last two or three hours, I can solemnly affirm. She is always acting, even with her nearest relations, which makes her very

charming perhaps, but very bewildering — at least to me.”

Cyrilla did not answer ; she watched the figures as they stood in the bright moonlight, with an interest that surprised her companion. It was evident that no common or indifferent subject was being discussed, for Rupert listened with deep attention—Virginie’s handkerchief was pressed to her eyes with a haste and trepidation of very striking effect, and at length a letter was drawn from her pocket, which she read slowly and with frequent interruptions.

“By Jove! she’s consulting him about the General’s proposal,” cried Victor, “expecting him, in all probability, to forbid the banns ; it’s an old affair that between your cousin and my sister, Mademoiselle d’Adlerkron, and would have come off very satisfactorily four years ago, they tell me, if it had not been for some unfortunate mistakes and misunderstandings.”

“Indeed! I was not aware of that,” said Cyrilla, quietly.

“The particulars I have never heard,” continued Victor de Lindesmar ; “for after being so long separated from my sisters, they bestow their confidence rather sparingly upon me ; but I hope all will go on well now, as I should like Adlerkron amazingly for a brother-in-law, he is such a capital fellow—just the thing for Virginie. How well she looks in the moonlight, and how picturesquely she stands there ! I had no idea she was so graceful !”

Nor had Cyrilla ; neither had she ever observed that Virginie used so much action when speaking ; but her various and unceasing efforts to attract Rupert, Cyrilla had long watched with displeasure, if not uneasiness ; and now Lindesmar’s words, though proceeding from a false representation of facts, convinced her, not only that Virginie herself was more in earnest than she had hitherto supposed, but that all her family entertained hopes, if not actual expectations, of so desirable a connection. An intolerable sensation of anxiety, a succession of irrepressible doubts and fears, overwhelmed her, and for a few moments almost impeded respiration ; yet so fruitful is the human mind in expedients to satisfy itself, that, when she rose to leave the

box, she had already convinced herself that Rupert's happiness was so much dearer to her than her own, that the mental pain she was suffering proceeded altogether from anxiety lest he might become entangled in the snares of an artful woman, rendered desperate by a tarnished reputation and pecuniary embarrassments.

As she moved through the impeding chairs, Lindesmar suddenly clapped his hands, and cried out, "Bravo, encore, encore!" Cyrilla turned back, and once more looked on the stage. Rupert and Virginie were advancing quickly towards the front, where the light of the last remaining lamp fell full upon their faces; the former laughed, the latter looked annoyed, but endeavoured to respond to her brother's fluent jests, which continued without intermission while they returned to the drawing-room together. Before they entered, Rupert stopped, and Cyrilla heard him say, "Virginie, after all, I must give you some advice on this occasion. Do not let any one influence you in your second choice—Bellegarde's opinion is of no consequence whatever, as he certainly does not value you as you deserve."

"Perhaps so, but he knows all the difficulties of my situation, and there is one which—but I would rather tell you of it some other time."

"Whenever you please,—the sooner the better, if I can in any way be of use to you."

The evening passed quickly and pleasantly, as most evenings do when people know each other intimately, and are not embarrassed by unnecessary attentions towards or deference for each other; but it was not until all excepting the Bellegardes and Lindesmars had left, that Rupert produced a long alphabetical list of his friends and acquaintance, and said it was now time to make a selection for the first representation of the opera.

They seated themselves round a table, and a very animated discussion began, in which even the President did not disdain to join as he walked up and down the room with steady step and slow.

It would be easy here to give a tolerable sketch of the

society in and about Exfort, and the temptation is strong, when the recollection of the brilliant precedents which might be adduced for this practice presents itself. It is true, a ball-room or club-house is the most approved place for novelists through the medium of some satirical ladies or gentlemen, to parade and inspect their fellow-creatures, and show their knowledge of human nature. Yet Melanie, with her list of high-sounding names before her, pencil in hand, and politely interrogative expression of countenance, surrounded by a group of figures seemingly vying with each other in ease of attitude and freedom of remark, would answer the purpose equally well, and even have the advantage of an equivocal sort of originality . . . Nevertheless we refrain, knowing from wearisome experience that a description of people who are not concerned in the events related seldom interests, and but too often tires the reader.

It was late when Melanie came to the end of her "scroll," as she chose to call the list; and the last name on it, in consequence of the alphabetical order of succession, was Zorndorff's.

"O," cried Madame de Bellegarde, rising; "we need not discuss him, he belongs to *us*, and will be invited as a matter of course."

"I only wonder he has not been here before," said Julie, pushing back her chair; "one really ought to do something to console and enliven him."

"It appears to me," observed Rupert, after a hasty glance towards Cyrilla, "that there would be a sort of indelicacy in supposing it possible that such a gay affair as private theatricals could be consonant to his feelings at present, especially as we shall afterwards dance until sunrise."

"I cannot agree with you, Rupert," said the President, stopping short in his walk. "The continuation of Edouard's grief cannot bring back his wife from the grave, and it is scarcely to be expected that he will mourn for ever."

"Certainly not," observed Mr. de Bellegarde; "King

David's mode of practising resignation is well worthy of imitation."

"If you have no objection to invite him, Rupert," continued the President, apparently unconscious of the support offered to his opinions; "I confess I should like to have him among us, and to see him restored to cheerfulness again."

"I merely offered an opinion," said Rupert, "and Melanie is quite at liberty to do as she pleases." If he expected to find an ally in his cousin, he was mistaken; she had not courage to attempt a word of opposition to her husband's wishes, and the name was underlined in silence.

Soon after, the President began to prolong his walk into the adjacent rooms, from one of which, according to his usual custom, he silently retired for the night. The party broke up after having made some arrangements for the ensuing day; but still unwilling to part, or tempted by the fineness of the night, they all prepared for a moonlight walk through the park.

"I suppose," said Julie to Cyrilla, as chance placed them side by side on the gravel walk, "I suppose you have heard of Zorndorff's eccentricities?"

"I have not heard even his name for more than a month until this evening," answered Cyrilla.

"Only imagine, he has left his beautiful house, barred the windows, locked the doors, dismissed the servants, sold his horses, and—returned to his old lodgings in the town!"

"Probably the rooms in his house gave rise to unpleasant reminiscences," observed Cyrilla.

"Very likely. I shouldn't wonder if Margaret haunted that library—he never could keep her out of it, you know: even on the night of the last ball, she found her way there through the conservatory, after having tried all the other entrances in vain. They say, she entered by one of the windows. Did you ever hear of such a thing, in a ball-dress, covered with flowers too? But she certainly did look unusually wild that night, with her water-lilies and green dress; and I never shall forget her face, as she came up to me, when I was dancing the cotillon, to ask if

I had seen Zorndorff, or Melanie, or you In order to get rid of her, I said that I was sure he had escaped to the library as soon as the dancing had recommenced, and, by all accounts, there she found him."

Cyrilla shuddered as she recalled the meeting that had taken place; but she did not speak, and Julie continued: "Henri and Victor have been to see him repeatedly lately; but until to-day, I have not been able to persuade Adrienne to go, though she knows that Melanie visits him regularly every week."

"Melanie is his aunt," observed Cyrilla, quietly.

"Well, we are his friends, and very much pleased he was to see us too; he became quite cheerful, and made me tell him all about the rehearsals; he knew that you had refused to play, and said, that from all accounts you were amusing yourself perfectly well with my brother Victor."

"Which you of course contradicted," said Cyrilla, quickly.

"Not I! What business is it of his? You have as good a right to amuse yourself with Victor as I have to amuse myself with him; and so I told him. He then showed Adrienne his little suite of rooms, which, considering that he now professes to despise wealth, were furnished with great luxury"

Here some of the others joined them, and the conversation became general.

On their return home, Melanie and Cyrilla entered the house, and retired at once to their respective apartments. Virginie lingered in the moonlight, talking to Rupert, and imperceptibly inducing him to loiter about with her. When Cyrilla, an hour later, extinguished her light, and timidly peeped through the half open *jalousie* of her window, she saw them still walking up and down before the house, conversing earnestly.

Virginie was too well skilled in the metaphysics of the heart, as they regard the passion of love, to be satisfied with the progress which the last month had enabled her to make in Rupert's regard. She had, it is true, renewed the unreserved intercourse of early years, but it had been

effected by disguising her real feelings under the mask of ordinary friendliness, and she was tired of the restraint, impatient of the slow progress of her plans. Greatly mortified at the total failure of the rather vulgar ruse which she had employed that evening, of endeavouring to rouse him from his apathy by exhibiting the written professions of love made her by another, and asking his advice, she did not now return to the subject—rather avoided it; but she spoke with passionate eloquence and without any sort of reserve of her unfortunate marriage, and consequent wretchedness, casting aside all restraint in the relation of a series of domestic horrors, the recollection of which seemed to have been engraved in words of fire on her memory. Shocked and amazed, Rupert listened to a recital of scenes of coarseness and depravity which he had hitherto supposed altogether confined to the lowest and least educated class of society, and his sympathy proved a but too great encouragement to his companion to continue—what she ought never to have begun. That she finally convinced Rupert of her husband's utter worthlessness and her own perfect innocence, need scarcely be said. Naturally flattered at the immense confidence placed in him, his offers of advice and assistance in the arrangement of her affairs were freely given, and as freely accepted. She confessed having some debts. How could it be otherwise, when De Rubigny had latterly spent everything at the gaming table, or on others, and had compelled her to raise money for herself and her child in every possible manner, forcing her on some occasions to submit to unheard of imposition!

“All that is at an end,” cried Rupert cheerfully, as they stopped before the hall-door. “If I cannot make you forget the past, I may at least watch over your future life, now that you have given me permission to do so.”

Perhaps Virginie misunderstood the meaning of these words. There was a joyousness and fervour in her expressions of gratitude, as she clung to his arm, when entering the house, which would have been less agreeable to Rupert had he known that Cyrilla's tearful eyes were following all their movements.



CHAPTER XLI.

RUPERT'S rehearsals with Virginie and the other performers increased in frequency and length from day to day. The music-room was often deserted for the theatre, whence the sound of the orchestra occasionally penetrated through an open door or window even to Melanie's drawing-room, where Cyrilla usually sat, patiently awaiting her cousin's leisure to ride with her.

These rides had not only been much curtailed of late, but on some occasions Rupert had excused himself altogether; and one day when, considerably past the usual time, he entered the room for this purpose, he was not a little disconcerted at finding Cyrilla already in her habit, and evidently unprepared for a disappointment. With undissembled annoyance, he explained that in consequence of Virginie having only that moment returned from Neuhof, where she had spent the morning, he feared when the rehearsal with her was ended it would be too late for them to go out.

Cyrilla said it was of no consequence whatever, and looked out of the window with a very well got-up air of unconcern; but Melanie, who was present, observed, somewhat discontentedly, that "It almost appeared as if Virginie, on purpose, chose the hours that would interfere with Cyrilla's rides."

"O no," cried Rupert, quickly, "what motive could she have for doing so?"

"I leave that for you to discover," she answered; "but

I am sorry that Cyrilla so often loses her rides, as Wilhelm says they are improving her health wonderfully, and making her look quite as she used to do."

"Cyrilla," said Rupert, endeavouring to catch a glimpse of her averted face, "after hearing this, you may be sure that nothing shall ever again prevent my being in attendance at the appointed time. In fact, being deprived so frequently of both your and Melanie's society had made me find these rehearsals inexpressibly tiresome and disagreeable."

"*Indeed!*" said Cyrilla, with very strong emphasis.

"So much so, that I assure you I have often been disgracefully inattentive. How could it be otherwise, with thoughts so continually wandering"

"To your workmen perhaps?"

"More frequently to you and Lindesmar, who have latterly completely distracted my attention by sitting under the oak-tree just opposite the windows of the music-room."

"But Melanie, the Bellegardes, and visitors innumerable, have been there also," said Cyrilla, smiling; "why must we bear the whole blame?"

"Because I only saw you, and Lindesmar's white teeth and black eyes," replied Rupert, laughing. "But, jesting apart, Cyrilla, I think you are beginning to allow him to pay you a little—a very little more attention than is exactly necessary, or quite prudent, all things considered."

"And, jesting apart, Rupert," she rejoined with some archness, but more earnestness, "*I* think you are beginning to allow Virginie to pay you more attention than is exactly necessary, or at all prudent that is, if you do not mean to to"

"No," said Rupert, "I don't mean to to any more than you mean to to"

The entrance of Virginie at that moment was rather agreeable to Cyrilla than otherwise, and at Rupert's request she went with them to the music-room, and for an hour made herself generally useful, singing second soprano, or even bass, as they required it.

When she left them, Rupert watched in vain for her

appearance under the oak-tree. Melanie was there, and Lindesmar, looking rather disconsolate; and a little later, the Bellegardes, and some other families from the immediate neighbourhood, with children and lapdogs in the usual profusion—and chairs were carried out of the hall—and tables were spread with fruit and cakes—and groups of people walked about—and mirthful youthful laughter ascended to the window which Rupert threw wide open.

“That lawn is a gay place,” he said, leaning out, “and the view of the lake, with the sun shining on it, is really very exhilarating—I wonder how it will look in winter?”

“Cheerful enough when covered with skaters,” answered Virginie; “and that it will be, as you and your regiment remain at Exfort. It is even pretty generally known that you intend to reside here in future, and are at present meditating the choice of a companion for life. As yet, you have managed successfully to baffle all efforts to discover the person most favoured; but of course once you have decided there will be little delay or difficulty afterwards.”

“Such has not been my fate, Virginie; on the contrary, your predictions three years ago have been fulfilled to the letter.”

“Cyrilla did not care for you then,” said Virginie, looking up; “but now? . . . now?”

“Now—” said Rupert, hesitating, “there is an impediment not to be easily overcome.”

“It will never be overcome—” cried Virginie, quickly, “never—never! Cyrilla has made a promise to Count Zorndorff, from which no consideration on earth will induce him to release her.”

“Who told you that?”

“Zorndorff himself—he says, that though now justly angry with him, he is convinced that her affection will eventually triumph over her resentment; and this is my opinion also.”

Rupert smiled contemptuously, and shook his head.

“Believe me, Rupert, you are wasting your best years in efforts to obtain the regard of a girl who never did, and never will, care for you. Her indifference about Madame Vinci ought to have convinced you.”

“ I do not exactly understand . . . ”

“ Why, can you believe it possible that, if she loved you the least in the world, she would have chosen bracelets for that woman, or assisted you to throw bouquets and garlands at her, as I am told she did, night after night in the Circus ? ”

“ And,” said Rupert, twisting his moustachios, and looking down on his companion, while his eyes sparkled with ill-suppressed mirth, “ do you think that an Adlerkron would condescend to be jealous of the directress of an equestrian troop, even though she were the queen of the Amazons herself ? ”

Virginie turned away, and tears of vexation rose to her eyes at what she supposed a taunt, but which had not been intended as such. When Rupert spoke again, it was to tell her frankly, that until Cyrilla actually consented to marry Zorndorff, he would not believe that all chance was lost for him.

Had Virginie known this sooner, it might perhaps have prevented her from forming plans and indulging expectations so totally groundless as hers of late had been. But Zorndorff's communication, joined to Cyrilla's very studied avoidance of Rupert since Margaret's death, had raised new hopes, which, now suddenly and totally destroyed by the last few words, caused such bitter disappointment that she could make no effort to conceal her feelings as, in a low faltering voice, she thanked him for his confidence, but—wished he had bestowed it sooner.

Rupert bit his lip and coloured violently as he turned over some music on a table near him, while endeavouring to recall his words and actions, as far as Virginie was concerned, during the last two months. Ever generous even in his inmost thoughts, self-reproach became the feeling uppermost in his mind, and, all-unconscious of the arts that had been used to attract and enchain him, he feared that he had, by his self-indulgence in her society, again entangled the affections of one whose only weakness, in his idea, was the too great trust she had ever reposed in him, and who, by his silence respecting his continued attachment to

Cyrilla, had been led to suppose him as free to choose again as she was herself.

He stammered some excuses, to which she listened with half-averted head, and a face glowing with the vermilion-tinted blush peculiar to brunettes; but at length, deeply regretting having so uselessly betrayed herself, and fearing total estrangement on his part, she turned round, and endeavoured to remove his embarrassment and her own by talking for a few moments, rather incoherently, it is true, of her unalterable friendship, but ending with some very plausible reproaches for his silence, and the want of trust in her made evident by it.

Never were reproaches more joyfully received, more willingly answered; but while he, with a light step and lighter heart, left the room, she stood motionless on the spot where he left her, overwhelmed with confusion and grief, and asking herself the question—"Have I betrayed myself or not? Why," she murmured, covering her burning face with her hands, "oh, why did I not remain silent, and leave him to imagine what he pleased? How much more free would now have been my sphere of action! But . . . I will not give up all hope yet . . . why should I? We are both still young, and Zorndorff is not a man to yield to any one, or for any consideration. I must speak to him, however, as soon as possible,—must tell him to insist on the fulfilment of the promise made him by Cyrilla. He laughed at the idea of Victor as a rival,—doubted me when I spoke of Rupert:—What will he say now?"

Throwing herself into the nearest chair, she then began to meditate on the course that remained for her to pursue. More than suspecting that Rupert had seen through her last feminine artifice, and aware that he knew her to be a proud woman, she resolved upon that consciousness to act. Instead of avoiding him, she would continue to seek his society, but assuming henceforward a studied reserve of manner, would let him only at well-chosen intervals perceive the efforts she was making to conceal a passion so strong as at times to cause forgetfulness of prudence, and induce her to break through all the restraints imposed upon her

sex. And so judicious was her art, so incomparable her skill in forming every look, tone, and gesture, according to her plans, that only those who have suffered from the wiles of a perpetual actress can form an idea of the trials to which Rupert's patience was likely to be put.





CHAPTER XLII.



IN the meantime, Cyrilla, determined in future to avoid Lindesmar, descended one of the back staircases ; and, having changed her dress, passed through the gardens, and hurried on to the silence of the beech-wood. Unobservant of the summer splendour around her, she sauntered on in deep thought, under the cool shade of trees, supposed to be as salubrious to human as destructive to vegetable life. Rupert's last remark about Lindesmar, proving so clearly that no interests or variety of occupation had made him forgetful or unobservant of her, was the only slight consolation she could find during the contemplation of her calamitous embarrassments, which the prospect of soon again seeing Zorndorff brought vividly to her mind ; and she dwelt long on the pleasant recollection, fancifully comparing it to one of those fitful gleams of sunshine that, occasionally penetrating the branches above her, though affording no actual warmth, nevertheless, by an easy effort of the imagination, might be supposed to indicate a cloudless heaven and bright prospect, when once out of the surrounding gloom. But scarcely had this idea taken omen-like possession of her thoughts, than it was scared away by a sudden quivering of the foliage around her and the low moaning sound of wind sweeping through the trees. These well-known harbingers of a thunder-storm, which the heat of the weather had made more than probable, caused Cyrilla instantly to stop, and deliberate what she should do ; for, although she had no weak fears

of lightning, and did not shudder at the sound of thunder, a wood was not exactly the place in which she chose to remain during the storm's continuance. Considering the way back much too long, she decided on endeavouring to reach the nearest opening to the lake, where Rupert had desired a boat to be placed every morning. There might be time to cross at least to the island, and perhaps even to reach the cottage, before the rain commenced.

She began to run along a lately discovered short cut through the trees, lightly springing over the protruding roots, when, on looking down a long glade to catch a glimpse of the sky, she perceived the figure of a man coming quickly and stealthily towards her. Had he walked upright or made any sign of greeting, she might have supposed him a wood-ranger or one of Rupert's workmen, and rejoiced in his appearance; but there was something in the crouching gait of the man, as he skulked behind the trees, that marked him at once as a trespasser, if not something worse. An indefinite sensation of fear began to oppress her, and she hurried on towards the lake, the sound of following footsteps only increasing her speed, until close at her ear she heard the hoarse whisper—"Stop, ma'am, if you please, and tell me if this road leads to any public-house where a poor traveller could pass the night?"

Cyrilla stopped, and endeavoured to explain that the road which he had left would bring him to the forester's house; but that before him there was only the lake or the moorlands, which were dangerous to pass without a guide.

There was something fearfully repulsive in the appearance of the man, as he stood before her, leaning on a stout walking-stick, and scowling at her from under his black bushy eyebrows. The growth of several days' beard was on his face, his hair was matted, and his cheeks sunken; the clothes which covered his thick-set figure seemed not to have been made for him, and were soiled and torn in many places; and he flattened his old blue cloth cap over his right ear with a mixture of negligence and impertinence, even while she spoke to him.

“Is there any one on the lake?” he asked abruptly, when she ceased.

“I don’t know,” she replied, moving quickly on.

“I’m in great distress, ma’am, and would be obliged to you for any trifle you may have about you.”

“I’m very sorry,” began Cyrilla, breathing quickly, “but . . . I have no money with me . . .”

“Your watch, ma’am, with the chain, may be worth something.”

Without a moment’s hesitation she handed it to him.

Having deposited it in his waistcoat pocket, he walked on beside her, swinging his stick in the air at every step, and apparently enjoying her terror, which, notwithstanding all her endeavours, was becoming but too evident.

“We’re likely to have a thunder-storm, ma’am, and that will chase the boats off the lake, I’m thinking.”

“Perhaps so,” said Cyrilla, beginning again to run on.

“Stop, young woman; you had better answer me civilly,” he cried, pursuing her. “I want to know if I can find a boat hereabouts—I’m thinking if you didn’t know there was one a-waiting for you at the lake, you wouldn’t run there so fast.”

He made a grasp at her arm as he spoke; but, with a sort of desperation, Cyrilla dashed off his hand, and bounded forward with a velocity that nothing but mortal fear could give. A faint hope of gaining the boat, and having time to push out into the lake, supported her until she heard the low muttered curses of the pursuer again close behind her; but on reaching the opening to the lake, her limbs began to falter, her heart seemed to rise to her throat, deep horror to impede respiration, the ground beneath her to heave, when—stretched at full length on the well-known wooden bench, she beheld—Zorndorff.

He started to his feet as, with a scream of wild exultation at her deliverance, she sprang towards him; but the revulsion of feeling was too strong, and she was scarcely in a state of consciousness as she convulsively pressed her face to his shoulder, and gasped out—“Save me, Edouard—save me!”

Before he had time to express astonishment, or ask for explanation, the revolting figure of the traveller explained all. With a scarcely perceptible motion, Zorndorff put his hand behind him, and taking up his cane, pressed a spring, and in a moment a long sharp sword was at his service.

“Who are you, and what do you want?” he asked, calmly.

The man was at first too much confounded to answer—at length he stammered something about having lost his way, and seeking some village or inn where he could rest; but while speaking, he eyed the boat so wistfully that Zorndorff could not help suspecting he wished to appropriate it to his immediate use, and consequently moved nearer to him as he answered, “Men do not expect to find inns or villages in enclosed grounds. Were I a gendarme I should inspect your papers—not being one, I bid you begone with all convenient despatch. You have given me more time than is necessary to note your face and figure.”

The ruffian grasped his stick firmly, raised it for a moment menacingly; but the more dangerous weapon, perhaps also the steady eye and posture of his antagonist, deterred him from commencing hostilities, and he slunk away into the wood, stopping occasionally to look back, and vent his impotent rage in imprecations, accompanied by distortions of countenance that produced a disgusting resemblance to the canine species.

Cyrilla, who had latterly been standing at a little distance, a trembling spectator of this scene, watched him anxiously until he was quite out of sight, and then sat down on the bench, and began to breathe freely; but with returning thought and composure she felt the most poignant grief at what had occurred—the bitterest vexation at her want of presence of mind. Why had she sought refuge with Zorndorff? Would not his presence alone have been sufficient protection? Why had she not sprung into the boat, and secured at once a retreat for herself and for him, had it been necessary? Had Rupert, or even Lindesmar, a woodranger, or the old fisherman been on the spot, she would have embraced any of them in the same

manner, and . . . laughed at it afterwards ; but Zorndorff was not likely to suppose that terror alone had dictated her movements . . . and how differently had she intended to have met him ! What would he think of her now ? and, in painful uncertainty, she looked up—caught his eye, and felt herself blush intensely.

“I must go,” she cried, starting from her seat, and quickly descending the bank towards the boat. “We are likely to have a thunder-storm, and . . .”

“And torrents of rain,” said Zorndorff, as a wild gust of wind swept along the lake, giving it the leaden colour of the sky above it. “In such weather,” he added, stepping into the boat after her, and taking up the oars, “I cannot let you go alone. You had better steer for the island, and wait in the cottage until the first burst of the storm is over.”

Cyrilla, who had no sort of inclination for a *tête-à-tête* with him, shook her head, said she did not mind the rain, and preferred going home. Without further remonstrance Zorndorff obeyed, endeavouring as much as possible to steady the small sharply-built boat, but too evidently intended for fair and not at all adapted to foul weather. The waves ran tolerably high for a small lake ; and Cyrilla, steering with the most feminine uncertainty and carelessness, dividing her attention pretty equally between the rudder and her garden hat, more than once placed them within an inch of capsizing.

“Steady, Cyrilla, and steer for the boat-house,” cried Zorndorff, at last ; “it must be just opposite to you now !”

“I can scarcely see it at all since the rain began,” she answered ; “but perhaps you will steer and let me row for a little while, until you have rested—you seem very tired.”

“No,” said Zorndorff, holding both oars with one hand, while with the other he loosened his cravat, and took a long gasping kind of breath ; “I am not at all tired, but I have lately been suffering occasionally from difficulty of breathing—fits of suffocation, which are very disagreeable.”

“I did not know . . . I was not aware . . . I mean I never heard of your having been ill.”

“Of course not,” he rejoined, beginning to row with increased energy; “how could you, after having forbidden Melanie to mention my name in your presence?”

“Have you consulted any one?” asked Cyrilla, without noticing his last words. “Have you had advice?”

“Yes; but I don’t mean to follow it . . . in fact, I cannot, for the violent exercise I have been told to avoid has lately become absolutely necessary to calm the intolerable restlessness that torments me—a restlessness produced by mental excitement of no common kind, and of which I can at present foresee no termination.”

Cyrilla was silent: she did not choose to be drawn into premature explanations; and indeed the gusts of wind and torrents of rain soon made all conversation impossible. Both as they stepped ashore were as completely wet as if they had been immersed in the lake, and both looked and felt inexpressibly miserable. The influence that the mind exercises over the body could scarcely be more fully exemplified than on this occasion: there is little doubt that had Rupert been Cyrilla’s companion, the boat-house would have echoed with merry laughter, and a quick walk up the avenue would have prevented the violent fit of shivering which befell her as she murmured some measured words of thanks, while Zorndorff fastened the half-swamped boat to one of the posts.

Irritated by her manner, but not wishing her to perceive that such was the case, he repeated the word “thanks,” and then looking up, asked “for what?”

Cyrilla turned away, and neither of them knowing how to continue a conversation so unpropitiously commenced, a painful silence ensued. Directly they came within view of the windows of the house, servants hurried towards them with umbrellas, and at the hall-door they were met by the President and Melanie. The latter exclaimed eagerly, “O, dear Cyrilla, we have been in such a state of alarm about you! When Rupert heard that you had gone out alone, he was quite frantic—went off directly to look for you, and even took some gendarmes who happened to be here with him! He is actually much more afraid of a thunder-storm than I am, and . . .”

“He never thought about the storm or rain either,” said the President, interrupting her. “The fact is, Melanie, we did not choose to alarm you and Madame de Rubigny by letting you know that those very gendarmes brought the intelligence that a criminal, who escaped the day before yesterday from Exfort jail, has been traced to Freilands Park, and was in all probability prowling about the grounds.”

“What an escape!” cried Melanie; “how she might have been frightened had she met him!”

“I *have* been frightened,” said Cyrilla; and then she related in a few words what had happened, and afterwards gave a servant a short note to Rupert, hastily written in pencil, to tell him that she had reached home in safety by the lake.

“And now, Melanie,” said the President, “you must in Rupert’s name invite Edouard to remain here.”

Zorndorff, after a glance towards Cyrilla, declined the invitation which his aunt rather hesitatingly proffered. “He should be obliged to return home to dress—could not be back in time for dinner—was not yet equal to the gaiety of Freilands . . .”

“Pshaw!” cried the President; “the sooner you get over that last idea the better—we miss you, and want to have you with us again. I know Rupert will be greatly annoyed to find that you preferred going home, to dry clothes, a good dinner, and pleasant company here.”

Zorndorff seemed to waver—one word, one look from Cyrilla would have been sufficient to retain him; but with an almost imperceptible inclination of her head, she passed on into the hall, and thence to her room. Scarcely, however, had she begun to disencumber herself of her wet garments, when a tramping of feet and confused noise of many voices reached her ear. The sounds were too unusual in such a well-appointed household not to attract immediate attention, and even to cause some anxiety. She rang her bell for the second time with some impatience, and at length her maid appeared, and began with great volubility to relate that Count Zorndorff had been taking

leave quite quietly of his excellency the Herr President, when suddenly his mouth filled with blood, and when he put up his hand, it gushed out over his arm; that he had refused to enter the house, and said it was of no consequence, but afterwards had fallen down quite like dead. She had not heard Mademoiselle ring twice, for she had just stepped into the hall to hear what had happened; and there was the Count lying on the floor as pale as death, and blood still flowing from his mouth, but not so much as at first; they said; and the Countess Falkenstein was kneeling beside him, and his Excellency walking up and down giving orders, and”

Cyrilla ran past her into the hall, and looked on with a strange confusion of thoughts, while Zorndorff was being carried to a room at the other end of the house. As she slowly followed and saw him lying with closed eyes, his face colourless, his hands and clothes covered with blood, the idea that he was—her husband—presented itself with a distinctness that was intolerably painful. The being she had once loved, and now dreaded beyond all others, was prostrated helpless, perhaps dying, before her, and she dared not show even the common interest which she might be supposed to feel for her sister’s nephew!

The most profound silence reigned in the room after the servants had withdrawn, and Cyrilla stood for some minutes in distressing perplexity before she summoned courage to approach Melanie, and say, in a whisper: “Do you think that the exertion of rowing could have caused this frightful illness?”

“I do not know,” she answered; “perhaps not, as he has been ill for some time, and”

“And,” said the President, somewhat sternly, “and doing everything that he knew was likely to injure his health. One would really suppose he had some object to attain in being dangerously ill!”

This speech seemed to irritate Zorndorff in a remarkable manner. With sudden violence he turned round, raised himself on his elbow, opened his eyes widely, and endeavoured to speak; but the words were choked in blood, and he sank back with an impatient moan.

"I am sure," said Cyrilla, compassionately, "no one would wish to be in this state if they could help it; however, I trust there is no danger to be apprehended, for I remember hearing that my father once burst a blood-vessel without in any way injuring his lungs."

While speaking, she had unconsciously approached the sofa, and Zorndorff, taking her hand, endeavoured to draw her nearer, when he gazed earnestly in her face. The President looked from one to the other rather inquisitively, and walked to the window; but when Melanie, hoping that the moment of reconciliation she had so long desired had at length arrived, was advancing to whisper words of peace and forgiveness, they heard a well-known quick step approaching the door, and a moment after Rupert, wet and much bespattered with mud, entered the room.

"I was sorry to hear of your sudden illness, Zorndorff," he said, going up to him; "very sorry indeed. It would have been pleasanter had you turned into your old quarters of your own accord, and not been so disagreeably compelled to occupy them. However, Melanie will take good care of you, and I have sent to Exfort to your man, what's his name, and desired him to come out here, and bring whatever you may want for the next week or two. In the mean time, if you will allow Ehrhardt to supply you from my wardrobe . . ."

Zorndorff, who was excessively vexed at what he considered a most untoward interruption, made no effort to speak; but, signing to Melanie to answer for him, closed his eyes again.

"My dear Rupert," she said, somewhat petulantly, "he cannot speak—dare not even move . . . how very little you know of illness!"

"That's true," said Rupert; "but I have written to our assistant surgeon to come and spend the night here, and you will allow that that was a good idea."

"Excellent," said the President; "for Melanie, notwithstanding her reproaches to you, is as ignorant as any of us what to do; but I hope Dr. Reiner will be here in a short time now;" and he carefully inspected his watch, and

began to compute the time necessary for a messenger to go to and return from Exfort.

Cyrilla, who had gladly made her escape into the hall, was soon followed by Rupert, who exclaimed: "You have led me a pretty dance to-day, Cyrilla; I prefer in future your sitting under the oak-tree with Lindesmar, or whoever you please. Seriously, had you not written with your own hand that you had met Zorndorff, and returned by the lake with him, I should still be striding through the wood in a state of distraction. The note arrived just as one of the gendarmes brought me your watch and chain, which had been found on the person of that daring villain. The very idea of your being even for a moment in the power of a robber and murderer just escaped from jail is too horrible."

"He terrified me beyond measure," said Cyrilla, with a shudder at the mere recollection; "but I have almost forgotten my fright in subsequent annoyance;" and, relating her meeting with Zorndorff, she bitterly regretted having so completely lost all presence of mind.

Rupert laughed, and assured her that Zorndorff knew too much of her sex to attach the slightest importance to any such demonstrations of regard when prompted by terror.

"I am afraid you are mistaken," she said, reluctantly.

"Not a bit of it," said Rupert; "I never in my life was so embraced as by a young girl who took refuge with me from the growls of a cross old Newfoundland dog. She thanked me, too, with floods of tears for my protection; but when I chanced to see her a few days afterwards, she had not the slightest recollection of me!"

"O, I can understand that perfectly," said Cyrilla; "and if by any good chance I had found a stranger at the lake to-day, I should have got over my embarrassment with a few words of apology. . . . But Count Zorndorff has the unfortunate idea that I still like him, and I hoped to have convinced him by my manner and not by words that such was no longer the case."

"There is no use in thinking about it, at all events,"

said Rupert; "and you have plenty of time to commence a new line of operations, as he will scarcely leave us for two or three weeks."

"You do not seem to apprehend any danger," observed Cyrilla.

"Not much; I remember his having an attack of precisely the same nature ten years ago, just after an unpleasant affair with a student of the name of Maier. His natural inclinations are rather indolent, and his habits luxurious in an unusual degree; but when suffering from any kind of anxiety or perplexity, he suddenly commences taking the most violent exercise, hoping, perhaps, that fatigue of body may blunt the sense of mental uneasiness. The change, however, is too sudden, and generally injures his health in some way or other. His being here will not, I hope, be very disagreeable to you; Melanie can take care of him, and Julie de Lindesmar devote herself to his amusement, so that we shall in fact have nothing to do with him; and at all events you know the President was determined to have him here next week. But I see you are shivering in your wet dress, and will not detain you any longer."





CHAPTER XLIII.



FOR some days Zorndorff was completely confined to his room, and though immediately pronounced out of danger, extreme tranquillity was necessary for his recovery. His first excursions were confined to the dining and breakfast rooms, which were on the ground-floor and near his apartment; and, tired of his solitude, perhaps also mindful of Cyrilla's matutinal habits, he one morning appeared in the breakfast-room at an unusually early hour, found her as he had expected, but, standing with her at the open window, were two children, a boy and girl of about ten and eleven years old, of whose arrival he had heard during his illness, and about whose names there had been some jesting in his room. They were Rupert's god-children, Rupert and Rupertina; and, to prevent confusion, it had been found necessary to adopt the nursery diminutive for the boy, and call him Pertl, while the two first syllables of his sister's name being dispensed with altogether, she was by universal consent called Tina.

Pertl and Tina were two clear-eyed, red-cheeked honest-looking children, not at all calculated to interest Zorndorff, who indeed scarcely bestowed a glance on them, but deliberately fixed his eyes on a very young man who sat alone at the breakfast-table, devouring rolls and coffee with a velocity perfectly inconceivable to Zorndorff, who, even in his student days, had been a most deliberate and delicate eater. Now, this young man, though a stranger to him, was evidently very much at home at Freilands, and, in fact,

he had been some weeks there; but, as he spent his days chiefly with the gamekeeper, and his evenings in looking over books of engravings, his advent has been hitherto unnoticed. Dark-haired, dark-complexioned, and heavy-featured, with a figure short, broad-shouldered, and muscular, his appearance would have been decidedly vulgar, had it not been for an indescribable ease of manner that more than concealed the clumsiness of his proportions, and the slight degree of bashfulness incident to his years. He finished his breakfast apparently undisturbed by Zorndorff's presence and observant eyes, rose, slung his pouch over his perfectly well-appointed shooting dress, fumbled in one of his numerous pockets for a dog-call, selected a cigar from a very ample case, and nodding familiarly to Cyrilla and the children, was about to leave the room when Rupert entered.

"Why, Conrad," he said, with some surprise, "you are getting later and later every day, it seems. Have you and Cyrilla been talking again about that object of your mutual dislike, our aunt in Salzburg? Zorndorff, I am glad to see you are able to breakfast with us. Allow me to introduce my cousin Walden to you, my heir-apparent, as I am his, should we decide on leading a life of celibacy. We are," he continued laughingly, placing his arm on his cousin's shoulder, "we are an interesting pair; at least, Melanie says so in some very pretty lines which she wrote the other day about our being the only sons of our parents, the last of our respective lines, alike holding fiefs which return to the crown should we die unmarried; and having every right, in that case, to the melancholy sepulchral distinction of reversed arms upon our tombstones! Do you remember, Conrad, how annoyed she was at my saying that I considered a reversed torch infinitely more significant?"

"I was not aware of the singular similarity of your positions," said Zorndorff, "or that the Waldens of Waldenburg were also reduced to one representative."

"That is what makes us interesting," said Rupert: "if it were not for that, the reversed arms, and Melanie's poem about us, we are a couple of as common-place fellows as

could be found on a fine summer's morning like this. By the bye, Conrad, you need not expect to find me either on the moors or at the marsh to-day. I shall scarcely get beyond the music-room, as the day after to-morrow our opera is to be performed before a tolerably numerous audience, and I don't choose to disgrace myself. In case you are disposed to be civil, you may come back at one o'clock to serve as a walking-stick to Cyrilla."

"May I?" asked the young man, turning eagerly back, and standing with the half-open door in his hands—"May I?"

"Yes," answered Cyrilla, smiling; "but I choose to have you without either gun or dog, meerschaum or cigar."

"She is kindly endeavouring to civilize you," cried Rupert, laughing; "and if any one can make you get over your dread of womankind, it will be Cyrilla. You are not afraid of her now, are you?"

"Afraid of me!" repeated Cyrilla, shaking her head incredulously; "O no, it is my fate to fear others, but never to be feared myself."

"You are liked all the better for that, I suspect," said Rupert; "at least, I can answer for my own sex. Gentleness and timidity in women are as much admired by us, as strength and courage on our side are esteemed by you."

"Perhaps so," she rejoined; "but I would willingly dispense with your admiration, for the comfort and advantage of having a little more courage."

"I wish," said Rupert, in a low voice, as he leaned out of the window with her, "I wish you had courage to free yourself from the trammels of—that man, who is undoubtedly watching us just now."

"Don't speak of him, dear Rupert," she answered with a look of alarm.

"Only let me ask you one question," he continued, in a whisper; "when you forbade my interference in this matter, were you wholly influenced by fears of the consequences to yourself?"

"O no," she answered quickly; "there were many other considerations quite strong enough to impose silence on

me. The happiness, and even safety, of those I most love, might become endangered, and”

“Ah,” cried Rupert, interrupting her; “that is what I have long wished to ascertain—what I have suspected from your determination not to consult me on this occasion. You dread, perhaps, a quarrel between Zorndorff and me. Let me assure you that all such fears are needless. I am no duellist—abhor the custom, and have never been drawn into anything of the kind in my life; but even were it otherwise, Zorndorff is not likely to imagine that the way to obtain your pardon or regain your affection is by taking the life of your nearest relation! Believe me, no provocation will ever induce him to do anything likely to place an insurmountable obstacle to the fulfilment of this confounded engagement.”

Cyrilla felt how just this reasoning was, how applicable, had the case been precisely as she had represented it to him; but Zorndorff was more at liberty than Rupert suspected, and she saw with regret that the latter, although he had hitherto faithfully kept his promise of non-intervention, was now but too evidently irritated by his rival's presence, and already began to chafe under the restraint imposed on him. Notwithstanding all his peaceful professions, and her knowledge of the wariness of Zorndorff's character, she dreaded too much her cousin's natural impetuosity of temper, shrunk from the burst of anger which would inevitably follow his hearing of the insult that had been offered to one of his family—remembered Melanie's not unfounded dread of the President's anger, shuddered at the idea of being in the end, perhaps, claimed by Zorndorff as his wife; and came to the conclusion that but one line of conduct remained for her, that of formally resigning Rupert at once, without reserve and for ever. As these thoughts passed through her mind, she leaned still further out of the window, bending down her head, in the hope that the long ringlets might conceal her tearful eyes from him; but she found it impossible to utter a word, until after a pause he added earnestly, “You understand me, Cyrilla?”

“ Perfectly.”

“ I did not mean to distress you ; but I thought it just possible you might be embarrassed by unnecessary anxiety on my account. Women sometimes have rather fantastical notions about such things.”

The sound of people entering the room, and voices he did not expect to hear, made him half turn round ; and he was about to leave the window, when Cyrilla regained his attention by saying hurriedly, “ Rupert, this state of things cannot continue any longer ; the indefinite engagement so generously renewed by you must end. I am now perfectly convinced of the impossibility of its continuance, and as I dare not tell you what you have a right to know”

“ I shall not ask you again,” he said, interrupting her good-humouredly ; “ only let me assure you that my question was not prompted either by distrust or unjustifiable curiosity.”

“ Unjustifiable curiosity !” repeated Madame de Bellegarde, placing herself between them. “ What on earth are you two talking about ?”

“ Unjustifiable curiosity,” answered Rupert, laughing ; “ but what a famous idea this is of coming here to breakfast,—I wish you would do so every morning—Is Bellegarde with you ?”

“ Yes, and Julie. It was she who made us turn out so early.”

Julie was already seated at the breakfast table beside Zorndorff, compelling him to talk about his illness ; and then declaring repeatedly, and with jesting significance, that she thought “ he looked remarkably well.”

Virginie’s little boy, the moment he entered the room, sprang towards Rupert ; the other two children showed every inclination to get into his pockets, so very closely they drew their chairs to his,—all three equally intent on monopolizing his attention, while he was by the others supposed rather unreasonably to be able to bear a part in the conversation going on about him.

The President was an unsociable companion at breakfast ; he eat slowly and at intervals, his eyes intently

fixed on the pages of some newspaper, literary journal, or pamphlet; and when he spoke, his words were ever a continuation of the thoughts suggested by his reading. Unconscious or unheeding of the din of merry voices around him, he turned to Rupert and observed, "It seems after all, Rupert, that the latest discoveries in agricultural chemistry have raised very just doubts as to the success of any attempts at the cultivation of moorland such as yours."

"I thought," said Rupert, looking up, "that was your opinion also when you approved of my plan of progressive turf-cutting as a means of subsistence for my colonists."

"Why, yes—partly—the removal of the turf has been recommended, as it is too deficient in mineral elements for the growth of grain of any description; but since we have ascertained that your subsoil is composed of quartz, gravel, and"

"O," cried Rupert, "it will be long enough before we reach the subsoil, the average depth of bog is full forty feet! They say, however, that the marsh when drained promises better things. I heard yesterday that the upper lake can be reduced to a mere pond in a very few years. My dear boy," he continued in a low voice to Pertl, "the ponies are not mine; but if you ask my cousin Cyrilla to lend you one of them, I am sure she will have no objection."

"I am glad, however," observed Zorndorff, "that the antiquated notion of draining and planting has been abandoned."

"Not quite," said Rupert; "for, besides the correction of the river, there are to be canals for the turf-boats, and, wherever trees are likely to thrive, plantations also."

"Which will require a century to grow," rejoined Zorndorff; "to say nothing of the certain losses in the first instance from frosts."

Pertl slightly shook Rupert's arm to gain his attention, and whispered, "He said he could teach me to ride in a fortnight."

"Who?"

"Your own groom."

"I don't choose you to learn from my groom. You must ask the *Stallmeister* to take you with him when he rides out in the morning."

"But the *Herr Stallmeister* does not like children; he—he—calls us brats . . ."

"You said," whispered Tina, "that you would take me to the island to see the cow."

"If there were any chance hereafter of producing an artificial alluvion—" began the President.

"Scarcely to be thought of," said Rupert; "the river has very little fall, and carries no slime whatever."

"*Du sucre, du sucre!*" cried little Alphonse, seizing Rupert's mustachios, and pulling his head towards him."

"You little monkey!" he exclaimed, laughingly, strewing the contents of the nearest sugar basin on the table before him.

Virginie protested it would ruin the child's teeth; and while Rupert was playfully reminding her that she had judiciously quieted his screams the day before with chocolate bon bons, M. de Bellegarde called out from the other end of the table: "I say, Adlerkron, excuse my curiosity, but I really should like to know what you are going to do with this famous bog of yours? Every one talks, but no one knows anything about it."

"And yet it is a very simple affair," said Rupert; "I have decided in favour of *Vehn* colonies, which have been found to answer so well in Friesland and Holland for more than two centuries."

"Never heard of them in all my life," observed M. de Bellegarde.

"Nor I either," said Rupert, "until a sort of personal interest—the hope of gain—and perhaps some other motives, made me inquire, read, and at last consult people learned in such matters."

"Well, and these *Vehn* colonies are something very extraordinary, are they?"

"Not at all. A *Vehn* or *Fen* colony is neither more nor less than rows of colonists' houses, built along a canal navigable for turf-boats. The sale of the turf must be

made certain, the communication easy, drainage and irrigation directed by an overseer who understands his business, and a tract of land given to each colonist, with some advantages which it is not necessary to enumerate."

"But I don't exactly see how these colonies are likely to increase your wealth so enormously as people here suppose," observed M. de Bellegarde.

"Nor I either for the next ten or twenty years," answered Rupert; "but it is very evident that, in the meantime, the sale of turf will prevent me from sustaining much loss—the people are employed, and . . ."

"Ah . . . altogether philanthropical!"

"Not quite," said Rupert, colouring a good deal, as he rose from the breakfast table; "I have computed outlay and income with a good deal of accuracy; and if the matter in any way interest you, you can inspect the plans, estimates, and calculations at your leisure."

"No, thank you. I know nothing whatever of business, and find it hard enough work turning my French francs, when I have them, into German florins."

Madame de Bellegarde's ostensible motive for coming to Freilands that morning was to make inquiries about the *Pensionat* at Strasburg, to which she intended to send her daughter Hortense: her real one, however, was the knowledge that a music-room rehearsal of the opera was to take place, which would bring a crowd of gay people together; and, as she privately observed to her sister, "What was the use of moping at home, when one could find amusement elsewhere,"—to which Julie had unhesitatingly answered, "None whatever. You may be sure that Klemmheim will be there; and, I dare say, I shall have Zorndorff all to myself for an hour or two."

And she *had* him all to herself; for immediately after entering the large drawing-room, an almost complete dispersion of the party took place. The President went to Exfort, Rupert to his study, M. de Bellegarde to smoke under the lime-trees, Cyrilla commenced drawing things most incongruous for the amusement of the children at a very distant window, and Madame de Bellegarde retired to

the balcony with Melanie, to make the proposed inquiries about the "sound, extensive, and polite education, combined with the influences of family and home, under the ever-watchful eye of an anxious mother, &c. &c. &c.," to be procured on tolerably moderate terms at Strasburg.

They naturally spoke of "geography and the use of the globes," although they do not form so prominent a part in the printed systems of either French or German female education as in the "sound English" one. Madame de Bellegarde touched lightly on the subject of morals and manners, and then listened with suppressed yawns to Melanie's dissertation on religion, as the basis of all well-regulated education; the necessity also of exercising the reasoning faculty, forming the judgment, cultivating the imagination, and encouraging a general taste for literature, which would afford Hortense herself, and those about her, imperceptible but endless sources of interest and enjoyment!

"Oh! Melanie dear," cried Madame de Bellegarde, endeavouring with her very small hand to cover a mouth which, naturally large, assumed hideous proportions when distended to a yawn; "I should think all these things were included in the board and lodging, geography, and the use of the globes. Only washing and accomplishments are charged extra; you know Henri is quite satisfied with the terms, and intends Hortense to learn everything!"

This was conclusive, and Melanie spoke no more of Strasburg or Hortense, but pursued the subject she had been discussing, by explaining to her listless companion how perfectly she would have educated a daughter had she had one! It may be doubted, whether Adrienne paid much attention to the description of the fancy education which had been destined for fancy's child—she seemed in an unusual degree occupied with the contemplation of the scenery, scarcely for a moment removing her lorgnette from her eye, excepting to rub it with an elaborately embroidered handkerchief, or for the purpose of stifling a succession of yawns, which, to Melanie's infinite amusement, she maintained proceeded altogether from nervousness.

“I do believe,” she said at last, affecting a look of surprise, while every trace of weariness disappeared from both features and person—“I do believe there is Klemmhein riding up to the house, just as if he had anything to do with the rehearsal. I should like to know what brings you here to-day?” she added, throwing a shower of rose-leaves on him as he dismounted.

“I have come to play audience,” he answered; “invited especially for the purpose, I assure you.”

Soon after, the sound of carriages and the clattering of prancing horses became audible, and then various well-filled char-à-bancs, calèches, and phaetons, surrounded by horse-men, might be seen dashing forward towards the house, and pouring their gay-coloured contents on the lawn. If the rehearsal of the opera had been the main object of the meeting, it seemed strangely to be forgotten. Some stood together talking—some sat down under the trees—others walked up and down, where the shade was deepest; and Rupert, Melanie, and Cyrilla’s appearance among them, seemed so much to add to the loquacity and enjoyment of the assembly, and made it so attractive, that Zorndorff and Julie de Lindesmar were soon left quite alone in the immense apartment, with its deserted balcony. The latter, scarcely conscious of the little attention bestowed on her, rattled on in a manner that might have amused Zorndorff, had not his mind been long completely pre-occupied. With great irritation, he had perceived that Cyrilla, during two whole hours spent in his immediate vicinity, had totally ignored his presence, not as if she had been acting a part, or trying to exasperate him, but with the calm decision of a fixed purpose. Speculations about her probable motives had sufficed to preserve his tranquillity while she was present—directly she left the room he became impatient, and at last, raising himself with an expression of extreme languor, he observed, while walking across the room, “One must be ill, they say, in order to appreciate health as it deserves.” Then stopping before Cyrilla’s table, he began to examine the sketches, half pencil, half water-colours, which she had made at the desire of the children. They were fair speci-

mens of drawings done "to order," in which not all the artist's technical talent could give an interest to weak and worthless designs.

"I am glad she has begun to draw again," observed Julie, taking up a portfolio that had escaped Zorndorff's notice; "perhaps, after all, she may be induced to finish the aquarelles for the album."

"What album?"

"O, I thought you knew all about Melanie's lottery for the poor man who broke his arm while repairing the ceiling of one of her rooms! Cyrilla compelled the President to take a score of tickets, and he actually won the crimson-bound album we had each individually set our hearts upon gaining. It was, however, in a fair way of remaining filled with pieces of *carte blanche*, had she not offered to furnish it with water-colour portraits of us all. They are, it is true, little more than sketches, but excellent likenesses; and she got on with her usual rapidity until Margaret's death, when she seemed to lose all interest in everything. By the bye, can you tell me why she was in such despair on that occasion?"

"I was not at all aware . . ." began Zorndorff, with a look of unfeigned surprise; and then he stopped and turned to his companion, as if he wished to hear more.

"O, they did not tell you of it, perhaps; but it was odd, to say the least, as she never appeared to care for Margaret during her lifetime; yet, when she died, her grief for her was deep and unfeigned—more so, I strongly suspect, than . . . yours."

"Mademoiselle!"

"Don't be offended, my dear Zorndorff. Your conduct to your wife was unimpeachable—admirable; but as to wishing her to have lived, or regretting her now, you must be more or less than man if you can do either."

"And yet," said Zorndorff, bitterly, "I have done both, though you will not perhaps believe me."

"I think it quite possible that you *have done so*. The suddenness of her death, the cause, the shock, and all that sort of thing. . . . But surely you must all along have

seen that she was dying; and, if you consider the matter rationally, you ought rather to rejoice at her being spared a continuation of hopeless suffering."

Zorndorff did not answer, but he sat down and deliberately began to draw forth the contents of Cyrilla's portfolio.

Julie continued: "I can imagine your having a horror of unhealthy nervous women now, and hope sincerely that your second choice may be more fortunate."

"Thank you," he replied, dryly; "but you can scarcely suppose that, after my painful experience, I am likely to think of such a thing."

"So my sister Virginie said when she first came from Italy; and yet now . . ."

"O that is a mere revival of old feelings—quite natural."

"But most absurd," cried Julie.

"I cannot agree with you," said Zorndorff, calmly.

"Of course not, because you do not know what is going on here. Why, it is the most evident thing possible, that Rupert and Cyrilla were engaged to each other months ago."

Zorndorff first examined the drawing in his hand, then looked up slowly, and said, "I think you are mistaken."

"It seems to you a matter of indifference," she observed, interrogatively.

Zorndorff did not choose to answer. He placed the drawing in a better light, and asked if the flowers round each portrait were emblematical?

"Most probably, as Cyrilla insists on choosing them herself."

"I suppose," he observed, "that I have no chance of a place among these portraits?"

"Not if it had depended on her, I suspect," answered Julie. "But the President, fearing that he might not get the portraits he most desired to possess, first proposed making a list in the order he wished to have them; and when Cyrilla would not consent to that arrangement, he wrote the names on slips of paper, folded them up, and made her promise to let little Alphonse draw them for her,

like lottery tickets. Your name was the first; and, oddly enough, though she refused to ask you to sit to her, the likeness is perfect."

Zorndorff had no doubt that it was so. He remembered having seen her equally successful when his features were less likely to have been engraved on her memory.

"But Margaret's picture is the best of all," continued Julie. "She sat several times, and was greatly pleased with the flowers given her . . . but perhaps you would rather not see it."

Zorndorff held out his hand in silence, and then shaded his eyes from the keen inquisitive glance of his companion, while he contemplated the portrait of the features that were then mouldering in the grave.

Julie grew impatient at his silence and apparent forgetfulness of her presence. "Poor soul!" she exclaimed, endeavouring to take the drawing from him—"Poor soul! it was those painted water-lilies that induced her to order the beautiful wreaths from Paris for her last ball-dress. They were exceedingly becoming, too . . . You remember them, of course?"

"But too well," answered Zorndorff.

"Margaret certainly dressed magnificently," said Julie, as if she were bestowing a high encomium; "exquisite taste and endless variety! You must have been immensely splendid in pin-money!"

To this speech Zorndorff deigned no answer; and she added, "Have you any curiosity to look at your own portrait?"

"None whatever; but a good deal to see the emblem flowers."

"If you expect a collection of rare exotics, you will be disappointed. Cyrilla only paints wildflowers and weeds, which I am not botanist enough to admire. However, the garland that forms your frame is pretty enough, and peculiarly fantastic. I believe this woody-looking plant, with the reddish flowers, is called *bois gentil*?"

"It is Daphne."

"And this?"

“Rather hard to say,” answered Zorndorff. “There are neither flowers nor berries, but the leaves make me suspect it to be *Solanum*.”

“I hate Latin words. Tell me the common name, and perhaps I may know it.”

“The common name is, ‘Deadly Nightshade.’”

“Ah! how horrible! and yet it looks very nice, twisted round the leafless parts of the other; and, ‘what’s in a name?’ as Juliet says on the balcony.”

“True,” said Zorndorff, rising. “Besides, this nightshade admits the hope that perhaps one of the most useful and excellent of plants may have been intended; but this third, with its baneful berries, can, as emblem, mean nothing less than” he put down the drawing, and turned away from the table.

“Than what?” asked Julie, following him. “Is it a poisonous plant?”

“One of the most deadly in our German flora.”

“Well, certainly that is not very flattering. But I am not surprised, as I have long perceived that she dislikes you.”

“Indeed! and in what way was it made evident to you?”

“Why, she can never be induced to name you; and, when others do so, there is a certain little haughty look about her head which proves to me that she has not forgotten that, three years ago, you . . . you . . .”

“What?” he asked, with forced composure.

“Deserted her for a richer bride.”

Zorndorff was for a moment so confounded by this answer that Julie saw her advantage, and continued: “If you think that Cyrilla, or indeed any woman, is likely to pardon such an offence, you are mistaken. We can mourn over the want of fortune, resign ourselves to the despotic will of a non-consenting father; but to be deliberately and wilfully forsaken for bank bills and bags of gold is too offensively prosaic ever to be forgiven. I am convinced that she not only dislikes, but has learned to hate you, by this time. Why, even my brother Victor’s hopes are better founded than yours.”

“Excuse me,” said Zorndorff; “but I do not think I said anything about having hopes. You are combating a mere supposition.”

Julie looked confused; but, quickly recovering her self-possession, she said, “I thought you asked me to tell you what I had observed.”

“Yes; but your observations cannot properly extend to me. We have been too little together lately.”

“That is true. You have been shamefully neglected, and almost forgotten, by everybody!” said Julie.

“But not by *you*!” rejoined Zorndorff, looking up with a mock sentimental air, of which she was sufficiently conscious to answer jestingly:—

“No; but I must confess that I have not had much time to think of you either. Freilands is not a house for reminiscences.”

“Rather the contrary,” said Zorndorff; “so perhaps you have been occupying yourself with thoughts of the future, and . . . that stout boy whose acquaintance I made in the breakfast-room this morning.”

“What! Cousin Conrad? the savage!”

“And have you made no attempt to civilize him? It is worth consideration, I assure you, for I can give most satisfactory accounts of his possessions in flocks, and herds, and lands, and fine old castles. You can make him anything you please, excepting, perhaps, loquacious. Can he talk at all?”

“They say he can . . . to Cyrilla.”

“O, indeed!” said Zorndorff, walking into the balcony, and then apparently becoming so interested in the moving figures beneath, that he did not perceive his companion’s shrug of the shoulders as she turned away and left him to his meditations. A few minutes afterwards, however, a scarcely perceptible step instantly attracted his attention—he turned round, and on seeing Virginie, advanced towards her and whispered eagerly; “At last! . . . Have you anything to tell me?”

“More than you will like to hear, I greatly fear,” she answered gravely.

“ Let me know it at once. The purport of your words may be of use to me ; but your sister has been torturing me, to the best of her ability, for the last hour, and for no possible reason that I can discover.”

“ Perhaps she has observed what I have heard,” said Virginie.

“ I hope not,” rejoined Zorndorff ; “ but let me hear all you have to say, and quickly, before these people come up stairs to make the noise they call music.”

“ I have spoken to Rupert,” said Virginie, and a deep flush passed across her dark features at the recollection of the interview to which she alluded, “ and—he—told me—that until Cyrilla actually consented to marry you—he would not believe that all chance were lost for him !”

“ Indeed !” said Zorndorff, contracting his brows ; “ that does not sound well. Adlerkron is no coxcomb, and would not have said even that, vague as it is, without . . .”

“ Without,” said Virginie, harshly, “ without being pretty sure that she was not unfavourably disposed towards him. I have no doubt that this is the case, and should say that you had little reason to hope, if you had not told me of her promise to you. Can you not insist on the fulfilment of it as soon as decency will permit ?”

“ No,” answered Zorndorff, thoughtfully ; “ I do not wish to proceed to extremities.”

“ But are you sure she will consider it so very binding ?” asked Virginie.

“ On that subject I have no doubts,” he answered.

“ Then persist in your claim courageously—she is very timid, and will yield to necessity. Let it be your care hereafter to prevent her from regretting her compliance.”

“ Your advice is pleasant,” said Zorndorff, “ but I dare not follow it.”

“ And why not ?”

“ Your sister tells me that Cyrilla already hates me. What prospect of happiness would there be in such a case for either of us ?”

“ Ah, bah ! . . . you don’t believe that she hates you.”

“ Why, no. I flatter myself that she is only angry, but

with so much right, that I should be sorry to give her further cause of displeasure."

"She cannot be seriously displeased—women pardon so easily all that undoubtedly proceeds from excess of admiration and love."

"But Cyrilla is so much accustomed to be admired and loved," rejoined Zorndorff, with a sigh, "that she scarcely thanks people for a homage they cannot help paying to her charming person, and still more charming manners!"

"So you intend to resign her without even a struggle?"

"Never!" cried Zorndorff, vehemently.

"I do not understand you," said Virginie with affected coldness: "you are not sufficiently explicit for me to be of use to you; so I think we had better dissolve our partnership."

"By no means," cried Zorndorff; "we can still be of the most essential service to each other, but our efforts ought henceforward to be directed towards Adlerkron—he must resign Cyrilla."

"He will not," said Virginie, despondingly.

"He *must*!" cried Zorndorff. "I wish," he added, after a moment's consideration, "I wish I had allowed you to mention this promise to him, if you considered it necessary."

"I did speak of it," said Virginie, "and discovered at once that he knew all about it."

"You do not mean to say that Cyrilla has told him?" cried Zorndorff, starting up and exhibiting a degree of anxiety and emotion that astonished his companion.

"If she have," answered Virginie, "I am convinced it was on condition of inviolable secrecy on his part."

"No conditions would bind him under such circumstances," said Zorndorff; "her confession once made . . . all is lost!"

"Confession!" repeated Virginie, with so much intense curiosity legible in her features, that Zorndorff made an effort to conceal his uneasiness, and sat down beside her with forced calmness.

"Were she to confess the exact purport of the promise,"

he said, after a pause, "Adlerkron would consider it little less than an insult offered to his family."

"And," said Virginie, sarcastically—"and might demand what is called satisfaction? Rest assured, if there be but the shadow of a danger of that kind, Cyrilla will never betray you."

"You do not understand me," cried Zorndorff, impatiently, "my life is in far less danger than my honour, and all I hold most dear on earth."

"Will you trust me? Can I in any way be of use to you?" she asked, in a low insinuating voice.

"N-o," he answered, moodily, "I will leave my fate in Cyrilla's hands."

"I should rather suppose hers was in yours," observed Virginie.

"It would be if she resembled you," he replied; "but I have discovered that the *word* love will not induce her, like the most of your sex, to submit to tyranny in all its various forms."

"Asserting one's rights is not tyranny," retorted Virginie. "You say she is engaged to you; but if you expect her hereafter to be your wife, you are very wrong to leave her so long unclaimed, the object of adulation to three or four men, any one of whom might be feared as a rival by a much vainer man than you."

She left the balcony, unheeded by Zorndorff, whose eyes followed Cyrilla, as she sauntered towards the lake with the two children and Conrad of Waldenburg.





CHAPTER XLIV.



PLEASANT excitement and cheerful commotion pervaded the household of Freilands during the whole of the day preceding the representation of the opera, which had latterly, with its scenery, dresses, and music, occupied almost exclusively the thoughts of its inhabitants and their immediate friends. It was the *Matrimonio Segreto* of Cimarosa, an opera that possesses the immense advantage for amateurs of requiring but six performers and no change of scene—one gorgeously furnished saloon of the rich merchant Geronimo, with its five doors, being sufficient for all the purposes of the slight intrigue, which is altogether based on the fact of the merchant's younger daughter, Carolina, having advisedly or unadvisedly privately married her father's head clerk, and being in consequence placed in rather a perplexing position, when a Count Robisone, who comes to the house as suitor to her elder sister, inconsiderately prefers her, creates endless confusion, and provokes the jealousy of the sister, in a manner calculated to try and exhibit that young lady's temper more amusingly than advantageously. All of course ends satisfactorily. Papa forgives the *Matrimonio Segreto*; the Count, with a magnanimity little practised in real life, immediately offers his hand to the turbulent sister; father and widowed aunt embrace and bless promiscuously; and a sextette, with elaborate triplet passages, forms the conclusion. The becoming costumes, with pow-

der, patches, and paint, embroidered coats, swords, and silk stockings, enhance the charm of every playful movement, heighten the effect of every ludicrous scene, and, pleasing the eye, unconsciously prepare the ear to receive eagerly those tones which the Emperor Leopold requested to hear twice in one day—perhaps the only instance on record of an *encored opera*.

Much to the President's annoyance, Melanie and Rupert took it into their heads that the company invited should appear in the same costume as the players. It was in vain his Excellency had grumbled and muttered about "silly fancies, provoking whims, unreasonable vanity of women, who only wanted an opportunity to exhibit all their laces and jewels at once, &c., &c." The idea was carried into execution, and on the evening appointed the guests poured into the rooms, without exception, according to "order," for the "request" in the invitation was little else, it being well known that even Zorndorff's entreaty to be exempted from the mummery, as he was in mourning, and only intended to join them for a short time, had been unheeded. Unwillingly enough, he had complied with the requisition; but his wish to see and be near, perhaps also to watch, Cyrilla for a couple of hours, overcame his repugnance, and he appeared in what may have been the mourning of those times, which, serving to make him even more distinguished looking than usual, he was universally allowed to be the handsomest man present.

That Cyrilla would look well, no one had doubted; that the dress would be unusually advantageous to her slight figure, had been expected; but that her appearance should be so unusually brilliant, caused some surprise, and much speculative conversation.

"It is the fairness of her complexion," said one.

"Rather the delicacy of her features," suggested another.

"No such thing: it is merely the choice of colours, and the quantity of lace. Nothing so becoming as lace for old or young."

"Well, Klemmhein, what do you think of her to-night?" asked Lindesmar, half triumphantly.

"She is lovely—but that sort of dress makes them all look well."

"Cannot agree with you," rejoined Lindesmar; "some look vulgar; and some put me provokingly in mind of Hogarth's pictures."

"Not surely the Countess Falkeustein!" said Klemmhein, half interrogatively, as he followed the direction of Lindesmar's eyes.

"O no, she always looks like a goddess. Erato even in rococo! By the bye, if we keep near her when we go to the theatre, she has promised us places in the stage-box."

The rooms had filled, and the various dancing engagements were being "booked," with all the business-like precision of a German ball, when the summons to the theatre took place; and then the gay crowd ascended the stairs in procession, filling the numerous benches and galleries in a few minutes. Zorndorff quietly established himself behind Cyrilla's chair, making no effort to attract her attention, which Lindesmar seemed disposed to monopolise altogether: she was not even aware of his vicinity until Madame de Bellegarde, between the acts, turning to him, observed: "The first cast of the opera was infinitely better—Cyrilla ought to have played the part of Carolina."

"I think," he answered, evasively, "the Viscountess is surpassing herself to-night; she is evidently playing *con amore*."

"Rather too much so," said Klemmhein, in a whisper only audible to Zorndorff and Cyrilla, "one might really fancy her Adlerkron's wife. I had no idea she was so strong in the *tendre* line."

"Virginie would have played the other sister better," continued Madame de Bellegarde; "figure, face, voice, every thing would have answered, but she and Rupert chose to be together, and opposition was useless."

"I think," said Melanie, "we may be quite satisfied with Julie's acting of the part, and with her singing too."

"O, as far as acting goes," said Madame de Bellegarde, "we have all talent enough; but Julie is not a good musician, and has had an infinity of trouble in learning her

part. Do look at Rupert peeping out from behind the curtain, and making faces at us ! I dare say they are uncommonly merry in their green-room, as they call it ; and I must say it was very arbitrary of the President to forbid visitors between the acts."

"I think he was right," observed Zorndorff ; "for one half of the audience would have considered themselves privileged to go there ; the other would have been offended if not invited ; and great confusion and delays innumerable would have been the consequence."

"Julie told me," said Madame de Bellegarde, "that they amuse themselves keeping up their characters behind the scenes, composing recitative of the most ludicrous kind ; and that Rupert and Virginie are infinitely more entertaining there than on the stage !"

"I can easily imagine that," said Lindesmar ; "for it strikes me that a private marriage, either on or off the stage, is usually more a sentimental than a comical affair ; and so Virginie and even Rupert seem to consider it."

"Yet, it is a capital subject for a comedy," observed Klemmhein.

"But has been used just as often for tragedy," rejoined Lindesmar. "Nevertheless, there is something attractive in the position, and I shouldn't at all mind playing first lover myself."

"On or off the stage ?" asked Klemmhein, laughing.

"Off—if I could find any one willing to take me, without waiting for this confounded place at the Exchequer, which my grandfather makes a *sine qua non*. I can imagine nothing more delightful than the interesting difficulties and mysteries of such a connexion ; not to mention the glorious certainty of unbounded devotion that would be mine ! A woman, who, in this land of legal formalities, consents to a private marriage, gives undoubtedly the most prodigious proof of unlimited confidence that . . ."

"She gives," cried his sister, interrupting him ; "the most prodigious proof of unlimited folly of which she can be guilty. What settlements could she ever hope to obtain in such a case."

Zorndorff, with contracted brows, and a gesture of impatience, moved his chair towards Melanie's; and Lindesmar no sooner perceived him speaking to her, than, under pretence of examining Cyrilla's fan, he leaned forward, and in the lowest possible whisper, poured forth a voluble speech, the purport of which Zorndorff in vain endeavoured to catch. The answer, however, was laconic and audible; it was the one word, "Nonsense," which seemed rather to amuse than annoy him; and he continued to talk on in precisely the same manner, while Cyrilla deliberately levelled her opera-glass successively along the rows of spectators, not for one moment turning round until the curtain again rose.

The opera ended. Unbounded applause followed; and immediately afterwards the theatre began to empty as rapidly as it had filled. Zorndorff was the last to move: as he did so, he perceived that Cyrilla, in her haste to pass him with the others, had forgotten her fan—he had scarcely raised it from the chair when Lindesmar came back quite breathless,—

"Oh, you've found it, have you?"

"Yes."

"Well, give it to me, like a good fellow—it can be of no possible use to you."

"Or to you either, I should suppose," said Zorndorff, haughtily, as he passed him.

"Come, don't pretend to misunderstand me, Zorndorff; I make no secret of my devotion to Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron; and you see . . ."

"I saw quite enough," said Zorndorff, sarcastically, "to make me suspect that she does not care much either for you or your devotion."

"Of that you must allow me to be the best judge," retorted Lindesmar; "she has now sent me here for that fan, which she greatly values, as it is a present from the President; and, without vanity, I may say she would prefer having it brought to her by me rather than by you."

"We shall try that," said Zorndorff. "Tell her I have

got it, and will either give it to herself or to you, whichever she may desire."

Lindesmar seemed to consider the matter not worth further discussion, and ran downstairs. Zorndorff was still absently playing with the costly toy when he was joined by the joyous and self-satisfied actors and actresses, on their way to the drawing-room. As they entered, Julie turned to him and said, "I hope, for once in your life, Count Zorndorff, you admired me to-night? Did my performance meet your approbation?"

"It was perfect—only equalled by . . ." he looked significantly towards Virginie, who smiled, and then moved on to receive the adulation showered upon her for her really faultless performance.

"Count Zorndorff," said Cyrilla, as she passed him on her way to Rupert, "I hear you have found my fan, may I beg . . ."

He held it towards her, but every effort to catch her eye was fruitless. She evidently was determined to attach no importance to the trifling circumstance, and received it much as she would have done had it been brought her by a groom of the chambers. Zorndorff, not a little mortified, but unwilling that she should perceive it, leaned over the back of a chair that was near the *causeuse* on which she and Rupert sat down, and listened attentively to their conversation, while his eyes wandered apathetically to the other end of the room.

"I hope, Rupert," Cyrilla began, unfastening her ball-book from the fan she had just regained, and placing the tiny page before him, "I hope you have not made any engagements, for I have relied on you for our usual dances, and refused to give them to any one else."

"That is provoking," said Rupert, bending over the tablets, "for Virginie said she would like for once to dance the Mazurka with me—but I can easily explain and arrange with her."

"No," said Cyrilla, "you must not think of such a thing—it is of no consequence."

"I had a sort of idea this might happen," said Rupert,

“but I did not like to say anything, for you know,” he added, laughing, “I belong'to Virginie, in a sort of way, for this evening.”

Cyrilla drew her pencil through his name.

“Let us send for Conrad; he will be delighted,” suggested Rupert.

“O,” replied Cyrilla, smiling, “he has gone to bed hours ago; his appearance so alarmed him when he was dressed, that no one could induce him to take a step beyond the door of his room.”

“What! did he not even go to the theatre?”

“No.”

“I flatter myself he has had rather a loss. Our opera went off famously—don't you think so?”

“Could not have been better.”

“I never saw Virginie look so well,” said Rupert; “and she certainly is a most perfect actress.”

“And you,” rejoined Cyrilla, “are, to say the least, a—very tolerable actor.”

“Playing with *her* would almost inspire an automaton,” said Rupert. “Scarcely any one else could have made my dull part endurable to me.”

“I can easily imagine that,” observed Zorndorff, with unusual emphasis; “there is something very irresistible about her altogether. That she possessed feeling, energy, and passion, I already knew; but that she could be so charmingly naïve and playful was a surprise for which I was not at all prepared.”

“Nor I either,” said Rupert; “and though I admire Virginie as much as you or any one can do, and grant that there are moments when she is perfectly fascinating, I find, on reflection, her extraordinary versatility more adapted to public than private life. A too perfect actress inspires a certain degree of mistrust. One fears she may use the power of feigning and moving the passions off as well as on the stage; and it might at last be difficult to discover the line where nature ends and art begins.”

Cyrilla took a long breath and smiled approbation of this opinion; it was perhaps this which induced Zorndorff to continue the conversation.

“Actresses who act when off the stage,” he said, “are by no means so common as is generally supposed. I have known many who were infinitely more natural in their general manners than those who, sitting in their boxes as spectators, gratuitously and incessantly acted for any or every one who chose to look at them.”

“I believe we *have* a good many tolerable actors and actresses in common every day life,” said Rupert. “With regard to professional people, your experience has been so much more extensive than mine, that I am quite willing to believe anything you say about them.”

There was something so unusually indifferent in Rupert’s manner, that had Zorndorff not had a motive for covertly praising Virginie he would not have spoken again. “I may be singular in the idea,” he said, “but do not hesitate to say, that I think it not only possible, but probable, that those who make it their study, and have the power to represent the feelings and passions, if at all successful in their efforts, must possess both in an eminent degree.”

“Are you talking of Virginie now?” asked Rupert, carelessly.

“The remark applies to her, or to any good actor or actress you choose to think of. Why may we not suppose that the feelings of players insensibly become stronger by practice, as well as the sinews of a wrestler’s arm or a dancer’s legs?”

“What a funny idea!” exclaimed Madame de Bellegarde, who just then joined them.

Rupert showed a decided disinclination to the discussion of either feelings or sinews; he whispered a few words to Cyrilla, and then they walked towards the ball-room together.

“Pray go on,” said Madame de Bellegarde, playing with her fan, while she nodded and smiled to her different acquaintances as they passed,—“Pray go on; I like so much to hear you talk.”

“About what?” asked Zorndorff.

“The dancers’ legs, and all that.”

“Rather let us go and look at those now dancing.”

“I thought you had made a vow not to enter the ball-room?”

“I!—make a vow!—For what reason?”

“O, I’m sure I don’t know.—On account of your mourning, they said.”

“Who said?”

“I don’t remember; but even if I did, I should not tell you—you look so magnificently ill-tempered to-night. Let me take you to Melanie, who has chosen the ball-room doorway to make her usual observations on the follies of this wicked world, even while she so largely partakes of them. Doesn’t she look uncommonly handsome to-night? Positively quite youthful! Powder and rouge make people appear at least ten years younger. I wish both would come into fashion again, don’t you?”

“No!” he answered, turning to Melanie, beside whom he stood silently looking at the moving throng for some minutes.

Madame de Bellegarde, after having curiously but vainly followed the direction of their eyes, and examined their countenances, said she should rather like to know their thoughts, though she more than suspected they were of a not particularly cheerful description.

“Mine were rather Xerxes like,” answered Melanie; “I was thinking where should we all be fifty years hence?”

“Well, I must say,” cried Madame de Bellegarde, with an expression of annoyance, “that is even worse than I expected. I believe you never think of anything but being dead and buried—so very uncomfortable and dispiriting. Any one else would have been induced, by these dresses, to retrograde a century in thought; instead of which, you anticipate just enough time to put us in our graves, or make us so old and ugly, that one must shudder at the thought.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Zorndorff; “let us rather amuse ourselves with the incongruity of the dresses and movements. What,” he added, turning to Melanie, “what would your great-grandmother, Adelgunde von Adlerkron, whose picture I have so often admired at Windhorst, say,

were she to catch a glimpse of her great-grandchildren flying round the room in this wild manner? Would she think even the near relationship of Adlerkron and his cousin sufficient to authorize such a public embrace—such a”

“Pshaw!” cried Madame de Bellegarde, interrupting him, “*you* are going into another extreme—talking like an antediluvian.”

“I thought,” said Zorndorff, “you proposed returning in imagination to the time of powder and paint.”

“Well, so I did; but do you suppose that people did not dance then?”

“They did, but in a very different manner, if we may believe chronicles and pictures. In those days the gentleman bowed his powdered head over the lady’s little finger, ready to apologize for being under the necessity of touching it.”

“I have read chronicles and seen pictures that tell quite a different story,” she said, carelessly.

“I dare say you have, but the less you speak of them the better. When people now talk of their great-grandmothers, they are supposed to think of flowing robes, dignified manners, and graceful reserve.”

“Not I!” cried Madame de Bellegarde, turning to Klemmhein, who came to remind her of an engagement; “I don’t believe that my grandmothers were in any respect better than I am; and taking us all in all, women are infinitely less worthless now than they were in the times we are representing in costume this evening.”

“I am inclined to agree with her,” observed Melanie. “Women certainly are gaining by degrees a higher position in society.”

“That was not what she meant,” said Zorndorff. “Her reference was merely to morals and manners in days of yore; and in the latter there certainly has been a very evident and remarkable change since the days of our grandmothers.”

“For the better, you must allow,” said Melanie.

“There is less apparent coquetry, and no affectation of

modesty. Where a woman formerly thought it interesting to be ignorant, or scarcely dared to whisper an opinion, she now looks us calmly in the face, neither abashed nor embarrassed, and pronounces judgment without reserve."

"And why should it not be so?" asked Melanie. "Are we not entitled to form an opinion, and give it, as well as you or any of your sex? I have no doubt that another century will emancipate us from the remaining trammels which still so unnecessarily hamper us."

"I did not know that you were an advocate for the emancipation of women," said Zorndorff.

"Nor am I, in the general acceptation of the words," replied Melanie, with unusual earnestness. "I have no wish to infringe on any of your prerogatives—no desire to step out of my sphere; but I think women ought to be given a more liberal education—should be taught to exercise their intellects as well as men, and then they would cease to be considered either mere subjects of pastime, or household drudges, as the case may be."

"That time is long past," said Zorndorff; "and it would indeed be necessary to retrograde a whole century to find men capable of thinking in that way. But are you aware, that even the degree of emancipation which you desire will greatly limit your power?"

"How so?"

"That very difference of education and manner which you so deprecate, is one of your greatest charms. Let a woman talk and argue with us precisely as we do with each other, and we may end by forgetting ourselves so far as to treat her and her opinions in a way that would be as offensive as new to her."

"Not much danger of that, as long as she is young and handsome," said Melanie; "and it is exactly to provide for the succeeding years that I propose a different education. Women living in what is called the world suffer, when their youth is past, mortifications and annoyances which, though not confessed, are but too evident in all those desperate efforts made to preserve and decorate their fading persons. Those whose station in life imposes on them a

continual succession of active domestic duties may perhaps pass into age and ugliness imperceptibly ; we of the world cannot do so. Our consciousness and dread of age is the just and severe punishment of a frivolously spent youth, and the only chance of mitigation lies in early laying the foundation for the rational and useful occupation of later years."

"A sort of intellectual provision for old age," said Zorndorff.

"Precisely. I would give home enjoyments to those restless unhappy women who night after night weary themselves at card-tables, or wander disconsolately about ball-rooms, where their grandchildren are or might be dancing."

"And what are the improvements in education which you consider necessary to produce this last most desirable result?" asked Zorndorff.

"I have ceased to think of improvements, and propose a total reform," answered Melanie. "Why, if we have the same improvable minds as your sex, should they not be cultivated by the same methods—why should reason be left to itself with us, and so carefully disciplined with you?"

Zorndorff shrugged his shoulders, and suggested that it would be advisable, perhaps, to try the experiment on a few ; the result would, at all events, be interesting.

"Exactly what I thought," cried Melanie, eagerly. "An education, to the age of fifteen or sixteen, precisely the same for girls as for boys."

"Pray, don't stop there," said Zorndorff, "or Greek and Latin will be the chief acquirements gained, and they will hardly prevent your old ladies from frequenting card-tables and ball-rooms."

Melanie smiled good-humouredly, and Zorndorff added : "May I hope that, instead of leap-frog and ball, you will substitute knitting and netting?"

"Rather skipping-ropes and hoops," replied Melanie, gaily ; "and though you may laugh at me, I am so convinced of the excellence of the idea, that I have serious thoughts of speaking to Rupert about Tina."

"Suppose," said Zorndorff, "you were to adopt that child, and have her educated according to your plan. She is a good healthy subject for an experiment, and I have no doubt her father would confide her to you more willingly than to any one else."

"Perhaps so . . . but a . . . she has no rank or connection, is not in the least pretty, or even aristocratic *looking*. What on earth could I do with her afterwards?"

Zorndorff bit his lip to hide a smile of derision. Any one but his aunt would have received a sarcastic reply; but great personal regard, and a sort of involuntary admiration for the grains of sense that like particles of gold could occasionally be sifted from her nonsense, always effectually imposed silence on him.

Just at that moment Cyrilla entered the room with Rupert, followed by Lindesmar and some young men, who laughingly exclaimed: "Lots!—let us draw lots for the dance: it is the only way to end the matter without a quarrel."

"As you please," said Cyrilla, sitting down listlessly; and while Rupert tore up some visiting-cards into different lengths, she added, "My ball-book is in a state of hopeless confusion to-night!"

"This is pleasant," whispered Zorndorff to Melanie. "While others surround . . . my wife, and draw lots for a dance, I scarcely dare to speak to her! I don't think I can stand this much longer."

"Remember that you are yourself to blame," she answered.

"Do you think I would submit to such treatment were it otherwise?" he rejoined. "My only consolation is, that I do not suffer alone. Cyrilla's pride is completely wearing her out. All her efforts have not enabled her to conceal from me that she is unhappy and ill."

"Ill!" cried Melanie; "why every one says she is looking particularly well—quite lovely to-night."

"She is rouged," said Zorndorff; "but look at the deadly paleness of the rest of her face. Can you not see her lips quivering when she tries to smile?"

"That is because you are so near," she answered, naïvely.

"I know it. She is no actress, and lets me read her thoughts like a book."

"And can you see her unhappy and suffering without an inclination to relent? Make her free, Edouard. Your doing so now would indeed be an act of magnanimity."

"It would be highly dramatic, undoubtedly," said Zorn-dorff, sarcastically. "Perhaps you can tell me in whose hand I ought to place hers when, in the act of resignation, I look upwards, mutely imploring a blessing on a union which is to wreck my happiness for life . . . Lindesmar's, Adlerkron's, or one of these noisy hussars."

Melanie did not answer. She was evidently hurt, both by his words and manner. He perceived it, and added, with suppressed vehemence, "No, Melanie, this is no comedy that we are playing, but it may become a tragedy if Cyrilla give me any just cause for jealousy. The promise I made her in that letter, to which she so often appeals, contained no clause to bind me in such a case."

This was almost too much even for Melanie. "And *he* dares to talk of jealousy," she thought, as she watched him leaving the room. "O what different measures men have for their own conduct and for ours!"

Like all summer balls, the dancing continued until long after daylight, when some hands with youthful temerity drawing aside the curtains, and admitting a flood of light, the tired chaperons were so effectually scared, that an almost immediate dispersion of the company followed, and only a few select friends remained to join Rupert and his cousins in the breakfast-room. Cyrilla's feelings, after her night of revelry, were unsatisfactory to the greatest degree. Wearied with dancing, and the forced gaiety which she had thought it necessary to assume, the whole vanity and folly of such pleasures began slowly but distinctly to rise before her mind for the first time in her life; and while still recalling the insipid events of the past night, she walked to the open window, and impatiently rubbed the rouge from her cheeks. The friction produced a natural

colour instead, and she perhaps never looked better than at the moment that Zorndorff and Conrad entered the room together.

"Ah," cried Melanie, who was enveloping herself in additional draperies of lace, "you who have wisely slept as usual, are come, I suppose, to laugh at our worn-out appearance."

"No," answered Zorndorff; "I have spent the time since we parted in walking up and down my room, and making occasional excursions to the musicians' gallery, whence I could see everything that was going on in the ball-room . . . the night seemed interminable to me!"

"Cyrilla complained of its length also," said Melanie. "For my part, since I have ceased to be actively engaged at balls, instead of feeling the ennui experienced by other spectators, I cannot help being painfully conscious of the passing of the time, the palpable loss of which is more evident in a ball-room than anywhere else. A little world in itself for the time being, each dance is an epoch—each . . ."

"Come, Melanie," cried Julie, "don't moralize until after breakfast; and as to loss of time, I should think it is pretty much the same thing whether we spend the night dancing or sleeping."

"Not quite," said Melanie, smiling; "you will find a considerable difference a few hours hence."

"Well, then, I shall either go to bed, or sleep on a sofa."

"And turn day into night," said Melanie.

"I do not see any harm in that either," rejoined Julie, yawning; "other people do the same."

"That argument is unanswerable," observed Zorndorff, with a slight sneer.

"I suppose," said Madame de Bellegarde, "we shall have another ball or a *déjeuner* when we get up Melanie's drama?"

"Drama and ball must be postponed until autumn," said Rupert; "the President cannot be induced to prolong his stay beyond the 12th of August, although my leave of absence lasts until the 24th, and after that we have inspections, and reviews, sham battles, and a camp outside the town."

"Delightful!" cried Julie. "I hope the camp will be at our side of the town, near Neuhof, I mean."

"If I be consulted," he answered, laughing, "I shall not forget to mention your wishes."

"It will be warm work for us," said Klemmhein, "but a brilliant ending for your military career. Adlerkron, until all is over you cannot well think of deserting us."

"Of course not," said Rupert; "and to a little work after so much play I have no sort of objection."

At this moment the children appeared at the door, and stood there gazing in silent astonishment at the strangeness of the dresses, and unexpected number of people at the breakfast-table.

"Come in, come in—don't you know me?" cried Rupert, and immediately they rushed towards him and began to feel the embroidery on his coat and to pull his ruffles.

Virginie first half-stifled her child with kisses, and then brought him to Rupert.

"Is he not beginning to look healthy!" she exclaimed.

"You *have* brought some colour to his cheeks by dint of kissing," said M. de Bellegarde; "but if you were to bestow equally violent demonstrations of affection on me or on Victor, I dare say the result would be the same."

"Alphonse is really getting quite strong," observed Madame de Bellegarde; "and for my part I am no admirer of desperately healthy-looking children—very red cheeks are decidedly vulgar. Don't you think so?" she added, turning to Zorndorff.

"Excuse me . . . I was speaking to my aunt, and did not hear. . . ."

"Alphonse has become quite healthy since he has been at Freilands—his paleness is constitutional."

"Most probably," said Zorndorff.

"He is remarkably handsome," she continued, "and I am sure you must admire his great black eyes."

"Of course I do," replied Zorndorff, "they are full of expression like his mother's."

"You could scarcely bore Zorndorff more than by talking to him about children," observed Rupert.

"I confess that I am no baby fancier," said Zorndorff, coldly, "and do not like children until they are reasonable beings—until they have ideas."

"And do you mean to say that Pertl here is not reasonable, that he has not ideas?" cried Rupert; "why, he has already shaped his plans for the future, and is fully resolved to study diligently in order to become a good man, like his father, and preach in the church at Windhorst."

"If you please," said the boy, with some embarrassment, "I think I should rather be like some one else, now."

"Indeed! Who then?"

"I should like to be . . . a . . . a . . . a tall hussar, and wear a dolman, and ride a prancing black horse about the streets."

"And, you young rascal, do you suppose that hussars have nothing to do but to ride prancing horses about the streets?" asked Rupert, laughing.

"O, I should have a gun too, and go out with the game-keeper; and then I would talk Italian to Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron, and ride with her, and lift her over the stepping-stones at the park ford when the water was deep, and . . ."

"That boy *has* ideas," said Zorndorff. "Come here, my friend, and tell me what else you would do if you were a tall hussar?"

But Pertl did not like the manner of his interlocutor, and drew back.

Rupert laughed, and told him he might consult his father about a change of profession during the course of the ensuing week, when he expected him at Freilands.

"Coming here?" asked Melanie, quickly.

"Yes, but only for a day or two. O, here comes the President—for the first time in his life too late for breakfast!"

Fearing remarks about their sleepy tired looks and fantastic dresses, there was a general movement of the whole party the moment he entered the room, Zorndorff alone remaining at the breakfast-table, apparently in deep thought, his head resting on his hand.



CHAPTER XLV.



HE unnecessary exertions made by Zorndorff on the evening of the ball, still more perhaps an effort to ride into Exfort a few days afterwards, had caused a relapse, which, though not dangerous, had been cause sufficient for his physician and the President to insist on his remaining at Freilands for some time longer; and there he either wandered uneasily from room to room, or, half reclining on one of the sofas, sometimes talked, sometimes read; but always, when Cyrilla was present, following her slightest movements with watchful eyes, and endeavouring eagerly to hear every word she spoke, even on the most indifferent subjects. He never directly addressed her himself, but made every possible effort to draw her into conversation through the medium of others; and every one, from different motives, seconded his endeavours, excepting Liudesmar and Rupert. The latter, conscious of the restraint caused by Zorndorff's presence, and perceiving with anxiety her daily-increasing paleness and nervous irritation of manner, proposed a renewal of their boating and riding excursions, to which she acceded after having stipulated that Conrad should be invited to join them. Zorndorff watched her goings and comings with a silent exasperation not unobserved by Melanie, who, however, hopeless of inducing him to relent, and fearful of provoking the anger of both by further interference, had resolved altogether to abstain from expostulations or entreaties on either side.

The weather, which had long been uninterruptedly fine, began at last to threaten a change; and one morning after Rupert had announced that the barometer indicated storm and rain, and that a succession of dark-looking clouds were already visible in the distance, Cyrilla silently collected her colours and crayons, took possession of a window in Melanie's drawing-room, and accepted with thanks Conrad's proposal to bring her some wild flowers before the rain began. While they were still speaking, the post arrived. There were no specimens of "adhesive cream-laid letter envelopes"—no heaps of little neatly initialed notes about nothing, as in England since the stamp era. A few diminutive newspapers were solemnly deposited on a marble table, and then three oddly folded letters disfigured with post-marks presented to Virginie, Cyrilla, and Conrad. Virginie grew pale as her eyes caught the one addressed to her, and she afterwards started and trembled in a very remarkable manner when she observed that Rupert was looking at her inquiringly.

Cyrilla clasped her hands, and smiled and blushed with pleasure as she exclaimed: "From Fernanda! O, Rupert, let us go to Melanie."

Receiving no answer, she looked up and perceived that he had followed Virginie to a distant window; and while apparently jesting about the letter which her only partially counterfeited agitation prevented her reading, he was gently endeavouring to gain possession of some paper enclosed in it. Cyrilla watched them for a moment, and then slowly left the room, unheeding in her turn of Conrad's exclamation: "Salzburg! my aunt!" and the crimson flush that immediately overspread his face, and made his ears tingle as the colour in them deepened into purple.

When Cyrilla returned with Melanie, about half-an-hour afterwards, they found Zorndorff alone at one of the balcony windows watching the drifting clouds, and listening with apparent interest to the long gusts of wind that moaned round the house.

"I have just ordered all the windows to be closed," said Melanie. "Don't you think, Edouard, it would be better

for you, in your present state of health, to avoid that strong current of air in which you are standing?"

Zorndorff murmured something about his life not being worth preserving, which made Melanie close the window herself in the decided manner of a careful mother, who will permit no contradiction from a wayward child when she fears health may be injured by it. Now, it is a curious fact, that the very youngest and most inexperienced women intuitively assume a right to dictate where health or personal comfort is concerned, and that the most refractory of men seldom or never in such cases dispute their authority. Zorndorff submitted with a look of gratitude, and said he rejoiced to think there was one left in the world to care for him.

Perhaps Melanie suspected his wish to draw Cyrilla into some explanation, and dreaded a scene which she foresaw would not end satisfactorily; perhaps his really weakened state made her fear violent emotion for him. She took no notice of either of his speeches, but asked, abruptly, "Where is Rupert?"

"In his study or armoury, or whatever you call that queer room of his; but you had better not interrupt him just now."

"Why not?"

"Because he went there with the Viscountess some time ago, and they seemed to have very important business to transact."

"Business? Nonsense!"

"I assure you I am serious," said Zorndorff, making a very faint effort to detain her. "It is some secret affair, and an interruption might cause great annoyance."

Melanie smiled incredulously, and walked on after Cyrilla.

"Listen to me, and judge for yourself," said Zorndorff, following; and when they stopped he added, with affected reluctance: "I heard enough before Adlerkron left the room to convince me . . . that . . . he . . . is . . ."

"What?"

"About to pay . . . her debts. He commences with

the milliner's bill to-day; and, if I may judge by the expression of her face, it can be no trifling one."

"Edouard, you must be mistaken—such a thing is not possible!"

"Why not? She and Adlerkron are *very* intimate."

This is traducing Virginie in an unpardonable manner!" cried Melanie, indignantly.

"You now force me to request you to go on, and convince yourself," rejoined Zorndorff.

"You are sure that Virginie is in the room?"

"Quite."

Melanie opened the door, and then had but just time to see that Rupert, sitting at his writing-table and biting the top of a pen, was quietly watching Virginie as she counted and arranged various packets of bank-notes. A moment afterwards the current of air between the open windows and door caught the loose notes, and sent them fluttering through the room. It was in vain that Virginie threw her handkerchief over some, and Rupert, blushing deeply, made snatches at others, while he exclaimed—"My notes! . . . my notes! . . . Virginie, you shall never help me to count money again!"

Cyrilla's pallor, Melanie's look of reproachful amazement, and Zorndorff's cynical smile, immediately convinced Virginie that the truth was more than suspected. For a few seconds she struggled with shame and vexation, made a violent effort to appear unconcerned,—but then, bending her head down on the table beside her, burst into a passion of tears.

Rupert started from his chair, and with some violence, began to close the windows. Cyrilla left the room silently, followed by Melanie, after she had observed, more reproachfully than apologetically, "That Rupert had given her permission to enter his study without ceremony at all times, and that she had not believed it possible her presence could be an intrusion when Virginie was with him!"

Cyrilla sat down at her drawing-table, and absently played with her crayons; while Melanie animadverted on

what they had just witnessed in unusually strong terms, ending by wishing very heartily that "Virginie would return to her own people, for there was every reason to fear that if she remained much longer at Freilands she would either injure her reputation or contrive to inveigle Rupert into a marriage—he was so foolishly good-natured and generous."

Cyrilla sighed, but gave no answer; and when Melanie left her she leaned back in her chair, vainly endeavouring to think calmly and without prejudice of all she had just seen; but, on hearing soon after the sounds of movement in the adjoining room, she hastily bent over her colours, and began to rummage among them very diligently for some unknown tint. Virginie had probably chosen to retire by the back staircase, for Rupert entered alone, at first impetuously enough; but, before he had walked half-way towards her, his step slackened, and on reaching the window he stooped down and whispered—"Cyrilla . . . dearest . . . you are not displeased . . . are you?"

"A little with myself, for having yielded to my curiosity, and followed Melanie into your room so unceremoniously," she answered in a low voice, which, however, was heard distinctly by Zorndorff, who had taken possession of a *chaise longue*, separated from her by a thick screen of large-leaved ivy, intended to protect the occupant from the disagreeable cross light of an end room. Rupert had, of course, seen him directly on entering—Cyrilla was quite unconscious of his presence.

"That is not what I mean," continued Rupert, in a still lower voice; "I want to know if you are displeased with me?"

"I have no right to be so."

A pause ensued.

"I suppose,"—and here he made a slight sign towards the ivy screen, unperceived, however, by Cyrilla, who was scribbling grotesque heads on some paper before her,—"*I* suppose *he* told you . . . told Melanie . . . all he knew about this provoking affair?"

Cyrilla did not answer.

“Just like him!—never straightforward . . . false alike to friend and foe!”

Alarmed at the suppressed violence of his manner, Cyrilla thought it necessary to offer the only excuse she could think of for Zorndorff.

“He at first only told Melanie that you were engaged on some important business, and rather endeavoured to dissuade her from interrupting you.”

She blushed deeply at the equivocation which her fears had prompted, and turned quite away from him while speaking.

“Then I have done him injustice . . . perhaps . . . but Virginie said she was sure that both you and Melanie knew all, and . . .”

“We know enough to feel a thorough contempt for her,” said Cyrilla, slightingly.

“Allow me to attempt a justification of her conduct before you condemn her,” rejoined Rupert, eagerly, and no longer speaking in his former scarcely audible manner. “That Virginie should prefer taking . . . or . . . or . . . borrowing a small sum of money from me, instead of applying to inquisitive and harshly judging relations, I find not only pardonable, but quite natural.”

“And I find it extremely improper,” said Cyrilla, decidedly.

“Suspend your judgment a little. You have never, like poor Virginie, been the wife of a selfish, worthless man, who, finding means to gratify all his own luxurious habits, has left you to the chance kindness of friends or the grudgingly doled out bounty of heartless relations!”

Cyrilla swallowed once or twice with evident difficulty, and Zorndorff clutched the cushion beside him, as Rupert continued what he considered a justification of Virginie.

“Of De Rubigny I have but to say, that gold was his idol, and, to procure it, honour and reputation were sacrificed without reserve. When obtained, it was altogether lavished upon himself; and though frequently possessed of large sums of money won at the gaming-table, his wife could hardly obtain from him sufficient for the common

necessaries of life. But why talk to you of such things? What can you understand of the struggles and trials of a neglected, insulted woman, whose very existence seemed at times forgotten by her husband?"

Rupert paused, but Cyrilla attempted no answer until he added, "Virginie has told me she was often in want of a few Friedrichs d'or . . . in want of the dress necessary for the society in which she lived! You will find it difficult to imagine trifling wishes of that kind ungratified."

"Not at all," replied Cyrilla. "My wishes have frequently soared beyond my means; but that I believe to be the case with every one in the world, no matter how high their station. Superfluous desires expand in tolerably exact proportion to one's elevation."

"May I ask you to tell me some of yours?" cried Rupert, eagerly.

Cyrilla shook her head. "I have learned from earliest infancy to control them," she answered quietly; "but even supposing it possible that I had for such purposes incurred debts, I can at least assure you, Rupert, that nothing in this world would have induced me to allow any man, excepting my father or brother, to pay a milliner's bill for me—Virginie has a brother, and yet deliberately preferred you!"

Rupert bit his lip, and observed, that Lindesmar could not effectually have assisted her without applying to his grandfather, on whom he was still dependent.

Again Cyrilla shook her head in an unsatisfactory manner, and Rupert continued: "If you will not listen to a defence, let me at least offer an excuse; you are probably not aware that her position in society was one which made a considerable expenditure in dress absolutely necessary"

"No position can authorize any one to incur debts they cannot pay. Do not expect to make me change my opinion on this subject, Rupert."

"Then," he said, half laughing, "I give that up, and only ask you to view reasonably her applying to me in her really trifling pecuniary difficulties: the whole affair, I assure you, is scarcely worth talking about."

“I am glad to hear it on her account; but the amount of money makes no difference in the act itself. What would you think were you to hear that I had in like manner taken Count Lindesmar into my confidence, and having complained of the cruelty of my relations, requested him to assist me out of my ‘trifling pecuniary difficulties?’”

Rupert was silent.

“Well, what would you think? What would you say?”

“No matter; the case is quite different: you have not known Lindesmar all your life as I have his sister.”

“True, but you forget that there are some other circumstances which ought to have made Virginie apply to any one rather than to you, had she possessed the slightest delicacy of feeling.”

“Women judge women more severely than we do,” observed Rupert; while, to hide his embarrassment, he rocked himself lightly on the back of her chair; “you have not left me a word to say.”

“I believe you,” she said, leaning back, and turning her head towards him. “You would have spoken better had you not in your heart of hearts been of my opinion from the commencement.”

“Well . . . a . . . but with regard to my part in this affair, I should like to know that you did not judge me quite so rigorously as my unfortunate companion.”

“No,” said Cyrilla, looking up to him with the sweetest smile imaginable; “I only agree with Melanie in thinking you a good-natured generous . . . fool!”

“Spoken like your own dear self!” cried Rupert; and what he might have added had Zorndorff not been present, it is hard to say. As it was, he bent forward, touched his lip with his finger, and then walked quickly out of the room.

Zorndorff, who had by no means been hiding behind the ivy screen, and had only intended to remain there until he could speak to Cyrilla without danger of interruption, was just preparing to advance towards her, when the sound of approaching steps deterred him. A moment after Conrad appeared, his hands full of wild flowers of every possible description.

"You don't mean to say you have been out in this desperate rain, and already collected all these beautiful specimens?" cried Cyrilla, extending her hands.

"No; I gathered them this morning for you: they have been in a glass of water; does that make any difference?"

"None whatever. I always put them in water when I paint, for they cannot bear the atmosphere of a room as well as garden flowers. But you must have been quite at the marshy end of the upper lake for these plants!"

Conrad nodded.

"And on the moor for the heath? Most exemplary of cousins! Just sit down there, will you . . . I don't see why I should not have a sketch of you as well as of other much less useful people. I have plenty of time to-day."

"Do you mean to put me into the album?" he asked, taking a chair opposite her.

"No; you shall form one of my own private collection. I hope you feel flattered at the distinction?"

"Indeed I do."

"So you ought; but you need not blush about it. Draw that japan screen between you and the other window; the light in this room is the very worst in the whole house for painting. That will do—now remain quiet."

"I thought you preferred people talking to you when you were taking their portraits?"

"*Cela dépend.* Yours would not be like if very animated-looking; it must be a silent, not what is called a speaking likeness."

"You think me a stupid fellow."

"No, I don't," said Cyrilla, beginning to sketch with her usual rapidity. "I have heard you talk to Rupert in a manner that would have removed any suspicions of the kind had I ever entertained them."

"I do not understand . . . cannot remember . . ."

"You see," she said, with pretended gravity, "when men walk up and down a room in our presence, talking of things beyond our comprehension, and using quantities of Latin words, it is astonishing how our respect increases for them."

“You are laughing at me.”

“Not at all, I assure you. Rupert has since taken a good deal of trouble to explain to me the difference between *allodium* and *feudum*; but I could not quite understand all he told me about the *Fidei-commiss*, which makes you mutually inherit from each other in case either should die without direct descendants.”

“Did he tell you that Freilands, and some other property which has accumulated during his minority, is altogether at his own disposal?”

“Yes,” answered Cyrilla, smiling; “and even promised that, in case he died unmarried, it should be mine. I don’t think my chance is very great.”

“So then,” said Conrad, bringing his chair by a sudden movement in contact with her table, and leaning his elbow on it—“So then he has spoken to you, and you are not angry or offended with him?”

“About what?” asked Cyrilla, looking up amazed.

Conrad blushed deeply, and stammered, “About his having refused . . . I mean, the not consenting to . . . in short, when I was in Salzburg my aunt Olga told me of the family compact, which . . . he . . . declined fulfilling.”

Cyrilla’s hand lost its steadiness; she threw down her pencil, and stood up with the evident intention of leaving him.

“For goodness’ sake, Cyrilla, don’t be angry with me!” he cried, anxiously. “Nothing was further from my thoughts than an intention of annoying you in any way. I should never have referred to that incomprehensible affair if I had not had a personal motive, and a very strong one, too. Just read this letter, and you will understand it all.”

“You had better tell me the contents,” she said, coldly; “the writing is unknown to me.”

“It is mine. I can write better than I can speak.”

“And I am to read it in your very presence?”

“If you will, I shall be greatly obliged to you.”

Cyrilla read it, folded it up with a half thoughtful, half amused smile, and returned it to him, while gently shaking her head.

“Is that the answer?”

“The best I can give you. Let us consider it a mere jest, and forget it.”

“I cannot,” said Conrad, resolutely; “for I have thought of nothing else from the moment I first saw you. Here is a letter to you from my aunt, enclosed in one to me which I received but an hour ago; and in it you will perceive”

“Ah!” said Cyrilla, interrupting him; “now I begin to understand you;” and she held out her hand for the letters.

Nothing could form a greater contrast than the calm, slightly ironical smile, with which the young girl read the letter, commanding her forthwith to bestow her hand and affections on her cousin Conrad instead of her cousin Rupert, and the flushed, anxious face of the young man, whose want of knowledge of the ways of women made him augur well from her composure.

“It seems,” she began, looking out of the window, instead of at him, “it seems you were in a great hurry to get possession of that old house, and its supposed treasures and antiquities.”

“I went to Salzburg solely for the purpose of negotiating the purchase.”

“And ended by negotiating a marriage,” rejoined Cyrilla, archly.

He blushed, until his features seemed to swell and throb painfully.

“Now, see, Conrad,” she continued, in the same tone, “I have too great a regard for you to let you be imposed on in this shameless manner. Putting myself out of the question, as a thing of no importance”

Conrad endeavoured to interrupt her; but she continued, “The house is really not worth the five thousand Friedrichs d’or, the rate at which my aunt has thought proper to value it, and you me. The situation is unfashionable, disagreeable; and it might even be necessary to consult an architect about its condition before you could attempt your projected excavations.”

“But,” cried Conrad, eagerly, “I don’t care at all about the condition of the house *now*.”

“Still,” said Cyrilla, “as Rupert will be sure to let you have it cheap hereafter, and without any encumbrance whatever, I really must advise you to wait.”

“Wait?” he repeated, inquiringly; “why should we wait?”

Cyrilla smiled; she almost laughed. In the ignorance or innocence of his heart, he felt greatly re-assured by her manner, and added, gaily: “Our aunt Olga certainly can drive as hard a bargain as any one I ever met. I wish you had heard her appreciating and me depreciating her old barrack!”

“I can imagine it,” said Cyrilla, tapping the letters on the palm of her left hand, while her eyes continued fixed on his with a certain mirthful expression, that could only have been misunderstood by a *very* inexperienced man.

“I began to fear we should never come to an agreement,” he continued, laughing; “for I had been fool enough to let her see my great desire to be in immediate possession, when all at once she informed me of the clause in my uncle’s will concerning you, and proposed our ending the difference by my taking you, with the old house as dowry.”

“And you agreed at once!—submitted to the dictates of prudence in the disposal of your hand without demur! Did you know what you were doing?”

“Perfectly. I saw your picture, knew that our ages were alike . . . connexion desirable, and all that sort of thing.”

“Right royally arranged, to say the least!” observed Cyrilla.

“Not the worse for that,” said Conrad, quickly. “Royal marriages, on an average, turn out as well as others. Besides, I had my father’s and grandfather’s example, and have heard them both say, often enough to make me remember it, that friends or relations could generally choose better than the persons concerned, who, more or less, were always blinded by personal inclination.”

“But surely you think a *little* personal inclination necessary,” said Cyrilla.

“O, of course; but I never doubted that coming in time;

for my aunt, and a whole lot of Salzburg people, told me you were quite charming."

"But you heard also that Rupert had refused me," interposed Cyrilla, amused at his boyish candour, and mistaking his certainty of success for jesting. "Did not that alarm you?"

"Not at all. In the course of conversation I discovered that that had taken place before he had seen you; and, from some unguarded expressions of my aunt's, I found out that she suspected Rupert had changed his mind, and was only trying to make use of me to force him to a decision."

A good deal surprised at the acuteness of this remark, Cyrilla looked up attentively.

"That was the reason I kept aloof at first," he continued; "for, with Rupert as a rival, I could have had no chance at all, you know. So I watched him, and let him laugh at my supposed fear of women and dislike to their society, while, in fact, I was only diffident, because I knew nothing about them. I don't remember my mother, I have had no sisters, and we never saw any one but my tutor's wife at Waldenburg. I liked her too. She was a good creature, but dismally ugly."

"Were I to judge from my own observation," said Cyrilla, smiling, "I should have supposed that you preferred my pretty Selim, or the brace of pointers given you by Rupert the other day, to all the women in Christendom."

Conrad seemed a little hurt. "We have jested long enough," he said, after a pause; "my letter must have convinced you that I am quite serious in my proposal. I have no experience in these affairs, for I never loved any one—I mean any woman until now."

"Ah, bah! what do you know about love?" cried Cyrilla, slightly, as she commenced putting aside her drawing materials.

"Quite as much as you, I should suppose," he answered, with some pique.

"Scarcely; for it never occurred to me to imagine my regard for you, or yours for me, anything but the natural

inclination towards friendship, which, as tenth cousins twenty times removed, we ought to feel for each other."

"I rather rejoiced in the distance of our connexion, as offering one obstacle less," he answered, gravely. "My aunt told me that Rupert seemed to think a nearer relationship an impediment." He paused; but, perceiving that with an impatient gesture she was about to leave him, he stretched out a trembling hand to detain her, and in a torrent of passionate words, that seemed to sweep away all his diffidence, overwhelmed her with so unreserved a declaration of his love and expectations, that she stood before him silent and dismayed, scarcely believing the evidence of her eyes and ears that it was indeed Conrad who stood before her and so spoke.

Yet, after all, there was nothing very astonishing in what had occurred. Zorndorff, as he looked frowningly through his ivy screen, was angry but not surprised; a very few days had convinced him that Cyrilla had unawares become the object of a violent first love to a young man, who, he knew, had been educated at home in perfect seclusion by an anxious father; and, now, but just escaped from the superintendence of an elderly watchful guardian, was quite ready to adore the first pretty face and graceful figure that presented itself, and, in defiance of the lessons of prudence carefully instilled into his mind, equally eager to offer and willing to bestow himself and his large fortune upon the same. It rather struck Zorndorff as a singular instance of wisdom, that prudence and forethought had at all directed Conrad's choice; but it had done so far less than either he or Cyrilla had supposed. The old house with its buried treasure had seized upon the imagination of the boy; the antiquities had interested the studious youth; and the early marriage so often recommended by his father became an imperative duty to the man: but had Cyrilla been "dismally ugly," like his tutor's wife, we may be allowed to take it for granted that neither the treasure nor the antiquities, not even the duty of providing a *dame châtelaine* for Waldenburg, or the laudable desire to give a home to an orphan relation, would have moved him.

As his impetuosity began to subside, his eloquence degenerated into something like complaints of having been led, by her evident avoidance of Rupert during the last few weeks, to suppose her indifferent towards, if not displeased with, the latter; while the kindness and familiarity with which he himself had, from the commencement of their acquaintance, been treated *by her*, had naturally led him to draw conclusions in his own favour.

Here Cyrilla stopped him. "That was a great error, Conrad, and you do me injustice if you imagine I ever endeavoured to attract you, or wished to make you like me, otherwise than as a friend or distant relation. I feel myself blameless, and can only lament the inconceivable inexperience on your part which has led to this painful mistake."

"Yes; I acknowledge that I am very inexperienced," said Conrad, despondingly.

"Very," said Cyrilla.

"I suppose my aunt's wishes will have no influence with you?"

"None whatever."

"And may I not at least hope that time . . ."

"Time," said Cyrilla, quickly, "can make no change in me, but it will enable you to forget, or, what is better, laugh at this affair as merely an amusing episode in your life."

"No," rejoined Conrad, bitterly; "I shall never forget or laugh at the recollection of this day. Experience, they say, is the best teacher, and this lesson shall not be lost upon me. Never again will I trust gentle manners, candid speeches, or flattering familiarity."

"Familiarity is no proof of affection in a case of this kind," interposed Cyrilla; "rather the contrary."

"With you, perhaps, but not with others," cried Conrad; and, stung by the self-possession of her manner, while he still struggled so hard with tears his manhood scorned to shed, he continued, "You will scarcely deny that Madame de Rubigny is as much in love with Rupert as a woman can well be, and she is familiar enough when in his room every morning."

Cyrilla, who had been progressing towards the doorway, stopped, and he added, "You look surprised; I thought every one knew that Rupert chooses to have Alphonse continually with him, and that Madame de Rubigny naturally follows her child."

"They have been intimate from childhood," began Cyrilla, quite as anxious to excuse him to herself as to Conrad.

"O, I know that," he said. "Don't suppose I blame Rupert for not objecting to have the Viscountess constantly with him; it would be very odd if he did. She humours his fancies famously, reads all his letters, and, by Jove, yesterday she knew better than he did where to find the fowling-piece I asked him to lend me! Remarkably clever woman—she understands perfectly what she is about."

So did Conrad at that moment, with all his inexperience; but no sooner had he perceived Cyrilla's rapid change of colour, and the anxious inquiring look she fixed upon him, than he repented what he had said, and endeavoured to soften it by adding, that "Rupert did not much mind Madame de Rubigny's presence—that he went on writing, and sometimes had his steward or woodranger in the room."

Still Cyrilla lingered hesitatingly near the door, dreading yet wishing to know more, and Conrad, though quite unconscious they were overheard, lowered his voice as he again approached her, and said, "I see—I understand it all now—you are—engaged to him."

"No, oh no," she answered, shrinking as if she feared further questioning.

"Then, I tell you what, Cyrilla," he cried, with a magnanimity quite thrown away upon her, "before I leave Freilands to-morrow, I shall give him my opinion of the way he is going on.—This sort of hesitating would be bad enough with Madame de Rubigny, but with you, his own cousin, it is perfectly unpardonable. I think, too, I may hint," he added, with a forced smile, "or more than hint, that he will not be dismissed with as heavy a heart as I shall take back to Waldenburg."

“For heaven’s sake, Conrad, say nothing to Rupert,” cried Cyrilla, endeavouring to stop him as he hurried past her, affecting a serenity he was far from feeling. “Conrad, I entreat . . .” But her cousin was gone, and in his stead Count Lindesmar came towards her, and spoke a few words with most unusual gravity.

“Excuse me,” said Cyrilla, passing him without a look; “I must speak to Conrad—who has misunderstood me in some strange way.”

“Every one seems out of temper to-day,” muttered Lindesmar, as he caught a glimpse of Zorndorff’s gloomy countenance. “The weather may have affected the others, but I have a serious disappointment to complain of. Only imagine, Zorndorff, the appointment I was so sure of obtaining here has been given to Dittmar! Being passed over in this way is both mortifying and irritating; and should it occur again, I shall be greatly tempted to return to my grandfather at Amboise.”

He left the room as he spoke, and Zorndorff, walking quickly into a distant and but little frequented apartment, looked carefully round him to ascertain that no inquisitive eyes beheld him, while he yielded to some rather vehement demonstrations of the anger provoked by the events of the last hour.





CHAPTER XLVI.

LINDESMAR, infinitely disgusted with the world and its ways, the weather, and everything else he happened to think of, wandered listlessly down the stairs and about the hall, until attracted by the sound of laughter to the billiard-room. There he found Rupert with some officers of his regiment, who having been on the road to Freilands during the storm, and completely wet by the subsequent rain, were now equipped, from his wardrobe, in a strange mixture of civil and military morning and evening garments; while Major Arnheim, who was a large athletic man, not having found anything to suit his dimensions, had been obliged to have recourse to the *chasseur*, and now gravely stalked round the billiard-table in Rupert's livery.

"It is a pity his *fiancée* cannot see him," cried Klemmhein, laughing.

"She would not look at him if she were here," said Rupert.

"What!" cried Arnheim, turning suddenly round—"Not look at me!"

"Not in that dress certainly, without being particularly requested to do so."

"I should like to try the experiment," said Arnheim, "if I had an opportunity."

"Try it on my cousins, who will be sure to order tea half-an-hour hence."

But Arnheim did not seem to have any curiosity where

they were concerned; he shrugged his shoulders and went on with his game. Not so Klemmhein; he instantly seized the idea, thought that playing servant to the Countess Falkenstein and her sister must be very pleasant work; and after having been a little encouraged by the others, actually put on a livery, and waited impatiently until an occasion should offer for presenting himself.

At length a bell rang—he was given a tray, and, furnished with tea-things and the necessary directions by the footman whose place he had taken, he walked up to Melanie's drawing-room. She was just entering it with Cyrilla, and speaking in a low, earnest manner, about something that seemed of absorbing interest to both. Completely occupied with the expectation of his detection, Klemmhein paid little attention to the subject of their conversation, until a sign being made for him to approach, he stood with laughing face and tray in hand between them. Not once did they look up, or even seem conscious that a human being besides themselves was present. Slowly and absently they dropped the sugar into their cups, held the cream-jug poised in the air, while they looked at each other intently, and spoke words of mysterious import, calculated to excite his curiosity, quite as much as it would have done that of the Hans or Caspar whose place he filled.

“As to how he happens to know all this,” said Melanie, alternately sipping her tea and playing with her spoon, “I have only to tell you, that he was here in this room screened by that ivy.”

“A listener!” said Cyrilla, contemptuously; “I did not imagine that possible.”

“If you consider for a moment, Cyrilla, you will scarcely blame him: he assured me, however, his intention was to have taken advantage of the opportunity for an explanation, which you must yourself acknowledge is now unavoidable.”

“The sooner the better,” said Cyrilla. “I hope you have prepared him for what he must hear. It would prevent a scene, and be pleasanter for all parties.”

"That is more easily said than done. I had trouble enough to pacify him about that boy, and endeavoured to make him ashamed of himself by saying, I should rather have expected him to laugh than be angry at anything so preposterous."

"You would not have laughed had you been present," said Cyrilla; "he was very much in earnest."

"I dare say he was . . . boys always are, and I am very sorry for him, poor fellow; but we have some one else to talk of just now. I wish you had had some screen, and could have overheard . . ."

Klemmhein reminded the speakers of his presence by again presenting his tray.

"No more, thank you," said Melanie, slightly waving her hand. "You may go now . . . or, stay . . . I think the rain has cooled the air extremely . . . bring some wood and light the fire."

Klemmhein was stormed with questions when he returned to the billiard-room.

"I told you," observed Rupert, "they would not look at you. I shouldn't be surprised to hear that they altogether forgot your presence."

"Precisely," said Klemmhein; "they seemed to consider me a sort of machine, a thing without eyes or ears, and consequently talked in a way that has excited my curiosity sufficiently to make me disposed to try to light a fire for them, in order to hear a little more."

"Did they really forget you were in the room?" asked Rupert.

"Not exactly, for they mentioned no names; and I reminded them of my vicinity when I thought I was hearing more than they might desire of some one who had been concealed behind a screen, and a boy who was very much in earnest."

"I don't find anything particularly interesting in that," said Rupert. "I would not walk across the hall, still less light a fire, to hear about either the one or the other."

"Nor I, perhaps, if I did not suspect the boy might be your cousin of Waldenburg, and he who heard behind the

ivy what he did not like to hear . . .” He stopped and looked towards Lindesmar, who was gloomily sitting at a window watching the large drops of rain coursing each other down the panes of glass.

A couple of young officers laughed without knowing why, and encouraged Klemmhein to light the fire and hear the end of the story. A few minutes afterwards he was standing before the grateless fireplace, into which, however, he carelessly threw the wood on perceiving that the apartment was deserted. Cyrilla was gone, and Zorndorff, walking up and down the adjoining room, spoke to Melanie in a low vehement manner. “Not a day,” he said, “not an hour . . . my uncle must speak to her—she will attend to him at least . . . for me she has no sort of consideration—seems to consider it something meritorious being implacable.”

“Edouard!”

“I wish you were back again in Exfort,” he continued, with increasing irritation, as the sound of Klemmhein’s entrance and noisy proceedings reached them; “it is one of the peculiarities of this house that, notwithstanding the unusual number of rooms in use, one never can be free from interruption for five minutes. That new fashion of having the doors to slide into the walls, and substituting curtains, is an intolerable nuisance. There may be some one listening to us now, and hearing a secret which, strange to say, continues one, though known to four persons—a fifth, however, without our strong personal interest to ensure secrecy, might be dangerous, so . . .”

Klemmhein had heard only the last few words; but they proved so clearly that something had been said which might cause embarrassment, that he did not choose to await recognition or attempt explanation. On hearing the sound of quick approaching steps he made a bound towards Rupert’s study, entered it, closed the door with some violence, and escaped by the back staircase.

“We have been overheard,” began Zorndorff.

“No,” replied Melanie, “it was only a servant. I heard him enter but a moment ago, probably to light the

fire as I desired—the few words he may have heard will be perfectly unintelligible to him . . . servants never understand . . .”

“Excuse me,” said Zorndorff; “they understand and observe a great deal more than any other class of people. Our frequent forgetfulness of their presence, the silence and restraint imposed on them by ours, alike tend to concentrate their thoughts on us, and call forth and improve their powers of observation in an unusual degree; while want of education, and grossness of ideas, make them the most dangerous and prejudiced judges of our actions. I detest servants, and . . .”

The sound of an approaching carriage drew him to the window, whence, catching a glimpse of the President as he drove up to the house, he hurried down stairs to meet him, leaving Melanie to the vain regrets and incessant anxiety which had latterly become so oppressive to her, that she had lost all interest in her usual occupations, and thought of nothing but a flight to Italy, as the only means of escape left for her and her sister. Should Zorndorff follow them, as he had once threatened, there was but little chance of Cyrilla’s recovering either health or cheerfulness. She herself began to feel a sort of indefinite dread of her nephew, that made his presence anything but agreeable to her; and she almost resolved that, the Alps once between her and the President, she would write to him and confess a secret which had placed them in the power of one who seemed resolved to be as tyrannical as he had been unscrupulous. Mentally, the letter was composed; and the excuses offered for her own conduct naturally brought her to meditations on Zorndorff’s. How had he disappointed her expectations! How completely convinced her that romantic situations in real life were more likely to be painful than pleasing! So completely had he shaken her faith in ideal love, that she felt forced to admit that men were egotistical beings, incapable of feeling or even understanding that sublime love, thoroughly refined from the dross of selfishness and interest, that had been the subject of her youthful poetical dreams. But no—there were exceptions;

rare indeed ; yet even her own experience furnished one : and, quick as lightning, her thoughts went back full fifteen years, and the object of her first and as she still firmly believed only love, rose before her.—Again they sat together and mourned over their hard fate.—Again she made the magnanimous offer of braving her stepmother, her father, and all the world ;—of telling Count Falkenstein that she hated him—and of waiting until Valentin had a home to offer her ; no matter how humble, it would be a paradise with him !—And then she heard his words of ardent gratitude and admiration at such disinterestedness ;—saw the struggle—the effort it cost to enable him to refuse the sacrifice ; but he had done so—nobly—and without reserve—not even accepting the vows of eternal love she so profusely proffered.—With a tyranny, of which she had only become fully conscious at a later period, she had insisted on his remaining near her, and being present when she obeyed what she chose to call his commands.—This, too, he had done ; and the certainty of mutual sympathy, in the fullest extent of the word, had supported both through the most trying hours of their lives.

Since that time no chance or change had brought them together ; but now she was in daily, hourly expectation of a meeting. He was coming to see his children before their return to school—coming to give Rupert advice about his Vehn colony, his church, and schoolhouse. She had heard him much spoken of lately ; had herself joined in the conversation. But when Rupert now joyously entered the room, and desired her to guess who had come from Exfort with the President, her heart beat violently, even while she answered with apparent composure, “ Mr. Englmann, most probably ;” and then she looked towards the door.

“ O,” said Rupert, “ you will have time enough to prepare a little speech for him ; he is so tired after having been all night in the mail, that he intends to take a bath and rest before dinner. We shall have a tolerably large party to-day—Arnheim, Stauffen, and some others, came here to fish ; but the weather compelled them to play billiards ; and they now intend to dine with us. Klemmhein

expected to meet the Bellegardes, and that he may not be disappointed, I have just sent off to NeuhoF to invite them; they will be sure to come, as you know they are always bored to death at home on a day of this kind."

Melanie was glad that their party had increased. She thought the expected interview would be less painful before witnesses—and . . . retired to her room to dress and prepare for it.

Most carefully she chose her gravest coloured robe. Most solemnly she covered with choicest old lace, formed to represent a cap, her shining black hair. Unconsciously, she wished to appear less worldly, in both dress and manners, than she supposed Englmann expected to find her; and yet a latent desire to please, perhaps surprise by her still remarkable beauty, was uppermost in her mind, as she walked towards the drawing-room, whence the humming sound of many voices told her she was as late as she that day intended to be.

The Bellegardes gathered round her—the officers from Exfort spoke of their frustrated plans—Klemmhein related how he had been playing at masquerade, and how mortified he had been at not having obtained a single glance from her Excellency, &c. &c. &c.; and Melanie answered and smiled, while her eyes furtively wandered to a table covered with maps and books, where the President and Englmann were standing, apparently discussing some very interesting topic. Somewhat offended to find that the latter could talk and care about roads and plantations when he expected to see her, the palpitations of her heart ceased by degrees; she waited sufficiently long to convince him that she too was indifferent; and it was a fact, that as she at length walked across the room, she actually felt very nearly as calm and unconcerned as she looked. What Englmann felt or thought, it would have been hard to conjecture; he bowed over the proffered hand, spoke quietly of the quarter of a life that had intervened since they had last met, and then endeavoured to repress the more violent than graceful demonstrations of affection bestowed on him by his two children. And Melanie put her hand on Tina's head, and

spoke of her, and of the education of children in general, and girls in particular, wondering at herself and at him, and greatly inclined to ask, "Can such things be?"

They can—and it is better that it is so. Fifteen years spent in the conscientious fulfilment of those domestic duties from which no station in life is exempted, will, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, extinguish the most flaming first love that ever burned on the altar of disinterestedness.

Melanie gazed with melancholy earnestness on the voluminous white neckcloth; the long uncurled hair, combed back from the calm but careworn face before her; and then—then—the fantastic little flickering flame she had so fondly fed with poetry and moonlight meditations for years, was—quenched for ever.

"Such, such is life!" she observed to Cyrilla, as they separated for the night. "I may be, as you say, a more contented woman henceforward, but for me the romance of life has ended; the pleasing sorrow that inspired my verse is gone for ever! Content is death to poesy."

"Perhaps so," answered Cyrilla; "but it is health of mind—it is happiness—and I cannot pity you for having gained it, even at the price of all your 'pleasing sorrows,' and poetical inspirations."





CHAPTER XLVII.



THE sun shone brightly into the breakfast-room the next morning; but lighted no cheerful faces, save those of Englmann and his two children. They laughed and talked together, unconscious of all that was being enacted around them; and had not Cyrilla been greatly pre-occupied, their gaiety would certainly have attracted her from the window, where she had stood so long, and silently following with anxious eyes the figures of Rupert and Conrad, as they walked together before the house, forgetful of time, and heedless of the but half suppressed yawns of the superlatively well-dressed French valet who leaned so gracefully against a pillar of the portico, or the fiery impatient glances of the bearded chasseur, who had stood more than three quarters of an hour beside the open door of the well-appointed travelling carriage.

At length the cousins approached Cyrilla, and making a sign to her to lean a little out of the window, Conrad said, in a low voice, "Will you allow me, as relation or friend, to give an opinion concerning your affairs, and offer you advice?"

"Most gladly," answered Cyrilla, blushing a good deal, while she glanced inquiringly towards Rupert.

"From what I have just heard," continued Conrad, with grave solicitude, "it has become evident to me, as well as Rupert, that some ungentlemanlike advantage is being taken of your want of knowledge of common law. A

promise such as you suppose you have made is an impossibility."

"You have said more than I permitted," she observed, turning reproachfully to Rupert.

"My dear Cyrilla, you could not expect me to let Conrad leave Freilands under the impression that I was acting as he supposed."

"Do not regret the confidence he has placed in me," interposed Conrad, quickly; "rather let me use it to make myself useful. It must be evident to you that Rupert is too much personally concerned and interested in this affair to discuss it with Count Zorndorff as rationally and dispassionately as is desirable May I hope that you will employ me for this purpose? One word, and I remain here to insist on your being released from such unjust thralldom."

"Thank you a thousand times, dear Conrad," said Cyrilla, extending her hand towards him, while tears started to her eyes; "I understand all the generosity of your offer, but I cannot accept it."

"You will not?"

"I dare not."

"Then," said Conrad, coming closer, and speaking in a whisper; "let me at least advise you to leave Exfort, and get out of the reach of that handsome tyrant as soon as you can."

"Even that will be more difficult than you suppose," answered Cyrilla, with a forced smile.

"You think he will follow you?"

She seemed unwilling or unable to answer.

"Come to Waldenburg, all of you he will scarcely besiege a castle in the Carpathians, with moat and tower still in good preservation."

"The President is going to Aix-la-Chapelle . . ." began Cyrilla.

"So much the better: then I can have you and Melanie without him, perhaps?"

Cyrilla raised herself from her stooping position. "No, Conrad," she said, with a melancholy smile; "there is not

the slightest chance of such an arrangement being made, nor could I even propose it."

"I may expect you at least," he said, turning to Rupert, and vainly endeavouring to conceal his disappointment; "the first use you will make of your liberty will, I hope, be . . ."

"To inspect your fortress," said Rupert. "You may expect me about the end of September."

"And in the meantime, Rupert, don't despise my advice because I happen to be a couple of years younger than you are. Keep clear of the Viscountess."

"I will," said Rupert, good-humouredly.

"It would have been well for me," said Conrad, as he turned from Cyrilla, and with bent-down head walked towards the hall door; "it would have been well for me if I had not let myself be persuaded to come here."

"Don't say that," cried Rupert, warmly; "for if you had not come we should have been strangers still, whereas now, I trust, we are friends for life."

"I am so very sorry to leave you all," said Conrad, greatly ashamed of what he supposed an absurd weakness.

"Then why don't you stay here?"

"Because I made a fool of myself yesterday, and everything is changed now. Adieu!"

He sprang into the carriage, the door of which was closed with a sounding jerk that made the horses prick up their ears, the postilions vault into their saddles, the valet clamber monkey-like to his place, followed with more dignity, but equal haste, by the chasseur; and a moment after they swept past the windows of the breakfast-room, where a number of loiterers were now collected. The President and Zorndorff were not among them—they had long been standing apart, perhaps too evidently waiting for the dispersion of the party. A look of intelligence passed between Virginie and the latter—she raised little Alphonse in her arms, and, with an unusually benign smile, proposed taking the two other children with her to Neuhof, "to play with Hortense and Josephine."

The invitation did not seem to give much pleasure;

they hung on their father's arms, and begged to go with him ; and when he said that he and Rupert would be too much occupied to attend to them, they turned imploringly to Cyrilla.

"I am sorry that I cannot walk with you to-day," she said, "as I have a long letter to write ; but if you go to Neu-hof, I promise to meet you at the ford when you are returning home."

"I intended to have kept them until after the children's dinner," began Virginie, "that is . . . if Mr. Englmann will permit . . ."

"O, no, no, no," they both cried eagerly ; "you will find us at the ford if you will only go there at twelve o'clock."

Cyrilla smiled, and then whispered to Tina, "Play with little Alphonse to-day, and don't shock the Bellegardes with unnecessary gymnastics."

The little girl looked up inquiringly.

"I mean, don't climb the apple-trees, or run races with Jérôme or Lucian."

Tina nodded her head two or three times, with an expression of great intelligence in her little bright eyes, and then followed Virginie out of the room.

The President looked at his watch with dignified thoughtfulness, murmured something about having ten or fifteen minutes to spare as he dropped it into his waistcoat pocket ; and then turning to Cyrilla in a grave business-like sort of way, requested to speak to her alone for a few minutes in the next room.

She did not surmise, she knew what she was about to hear ; but, like most women, her imagination was both fertile and vivid, and had already furnished her with so many painful interviews with the President, that the reality fell far short of the supposition, and the courage and determination which she took with her was more than sufficient for the occasion. She sat down on the offered chair with a half-suppressed sigh of resignation, and if the first question was startling, she was at least prepared to answer it.

"Without your mistaking my motive for mere vulgar

curiosity, Cyrilla, may I ask if you are engaged to your cousin, Rupert?"

"I am not."

"But a few days ago," he continued, "I should have heard this answer with great regret: I ought now to rejoice at it, yet I find it impossible to do so."

Cyrilla demanded no explanation of these words, and, much surprised at her composure, he added; "It is your own wish of course that it is so?"

"Yes," she answered, drawing in her breath quickly; "circumstances have made it very probable that I shall never enter into any engagement."

"With him? Then, after all, my nephew may be right, though for my part I doubted his having the slightest chance. That unpleasant explanation at Spa, and his subsequent marriage, were not, I supposed, likely to be forgotten or forgiven so quickly, and . . ."

Cyrilla interrupted him with the assurance that she was very glad to find his opinion coincided so exactly with her own.

"I am but a bungler in affairs of this kind," said the President, "and ought not to have referred to that day at Spa when I intended to plead Edouard's cause for him; but the fact is, had I not been present then, I could not have been aware of the motives which now induce him, notwithstanding the recent death of his wife, to seize the earliest opportunity of showing his desire to atone for conduct so criminal as he acknowledges his to have been on that occasion."

Uninterrupted by Cyrilla, the President enlarged on this topic for a considerable time; but when he allowed her to perceive that Zorndorff entertained no doubts of ultimate success—expected that she would, in the course of the ensuing year, pardon if not forget the past, and bestow her hand on him, nay even now required a promise to that effect, her anger overcame all other feelings, and with a fluency which afterwards astonished herself, she altogether declined the proposed alliance, and begged never to hear it mentioned again.

“Have you well considered what you are doing, Cyrilla?” asked the President very seriously.

“Yes,” she answered, rising; “you cannot suppose me in the least surprised at what you have said—I expected to hear it, not just yet, perhaps, but the sooner your nephew is made acquainted with my unalterable decision the better.”

“Your ‘unalterable decision!’” repeated the President, with a slightly ironical smile, as his eyes followed the youthful figure retreating towards the door. “That sounds well, but means nothing, Cyrilla. Listen to me . . . There is nothing unalterable in this world. As well might we hope to stop the course of time as the progress of change: it is incessant, not alone in things and persons, but in minds also. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, these changes take place, and are only known to us by their effects, or felt from the manner in which they influence our actions.” He paused, and then added, gravely—“Will you not defer your final answer, and try what change a year may make in your ideas on this very important subject?”

Cyrilla had stopped, scarcely knowing whether to feel annoyed or amused at the calm answer to her rather vehement speech. He seemed to think that she was wavering already in her “unalterable decision,” and perhaps intended to confirm any prudent consideration that might have arisen, when he added—“If you are not likely to enter into an engagement with Rupert, Edouard’s proposal is worthy of at least some months’ consideration. He is now in every respect a most eligible *parti*, and is as much attached to you as any woman could desire—more so, in fact, than is conducive to happiness—for he seems extravagantly jealous, without a shadow of cause that I can discover.”

A painful feeling of consciousness suffused Cyrilla’s face with a deep blush:—a moment afterwards, the fear that Zorndorff might at last have discovered her preference for Rupert made her so pale, that even the President observed it. He fixed his keen grey eyes on her, and said slowly—“Can it be possible that, with the choice of two such men

as Edouard and Rupert, you think of throwing yourself away on Count Lindesmar?"

"O, no," she answered, greatly relieved to perceive that Rupert had not been referred to; "I . . . I . . . merely wish to remain as I am for a few years longer."

The President looked perplexed for a moment. "I believe," he said, turning to the door of the breakfast-room, "I believe it would be better if Edouard spoke to you himself."

But Cyrilla did not feel disposed for further explanations; and the moment the President left the room, she opened the door near which she was standing, and ran up the stairs to Rupert's study with such eager haste, that when there she could scarcely articulate.

Englmann had been looking over some plans and estimates of school-houses with him. They both turned round, rather surprised.

"Rupert . . . let me go . . . with you . . . to . . . the marsh to-day . . . You must take me . . . I shall be as little troublesome as possible."

"We shall be only too happy to have you with us," cried Rupert; "but put on very strong boots, for after yesterday's rain some of the fields will be half under water."

To this direction she paid no attention, but waited to descend the stairs with him, and when in the hall sent for her bonnet and gloves. While they were still standing at the foot of the staircase, the President came out of the breakfast-room, followed by Zorndorff in a state of such exasperation that all his efforts were insufficient effectually to conceal it. He whispered a few words to his uncle, as they walked to the hall-door together, and then turned round and frowningly watched Cyrilla, who, with nervous haste, tied on her garden bonnet, and sent some scarcely intelligible message to her sister—hurrying past him even while still speaking.

"Cyrilla," cried Rupert, following her, "you cannot cross the fields if you do not put on the boots you had made on purpose for the marsh. There is plenty of time still—we are not in any hurry."

“But I am,” said Cyrilla, walking quickly on. “I want to get away from *him*,” she added, in a low voice. “Perhaps he may return to Exfort with the President, and let us enjoy our remaining time at Freilands in peace and happiness.”

“Oh! you have had an explanation at last?”

“Not with him—it was the President who spoke to me. But as he will not hesitate to repeat all I said, I may hope to hear no more about this matter for some time at least.”

“But you are still bound by your promise? still unable to bestow a kind word or look on me when he is present?”

“He cannot always be present,” said Cyrilla, with a deep sigh.

“In his uncle’s house at least he will seldom be absent, and it is there I must see you in future.”

Cyrilla was silent; and the Vicar, observing that they had ceased to speak, walked on beside them, and was soon engaged in conversation with Rupert on the endless subject of parishioners and parish duties.

Half provoked with her cousin for feeling an interest just then in such details, Cyrilla moved on alone,—at last so completely wrapped up in her own thoughts that she ceased altogether to hear the voices of her companions. She was not quite sure that she had acted wisely in avoiding an interview with Zorndorff—perhaps she ought to have made one more appeal to his generosity,—but after what Melanie had told her, how could she expect anything but disappointment? No, she must trust to time,—must wait until he himself proposed to act as she had so often in vain implored him to do. The President had said that time of itself brought change, and he was right. What had not three years done for her? what might not three more do for Zorndorff?

At the lake they found the fisher and his son lazily stretched in Rupert’s wherry: they both started up, and began to arrange the seats.

“Bring out the new boat with the awning,” said Rupert. “I don’t intend to row to-day.”

“What a luxurious amusement boating is!” observed

Englmann, throwing himself back on the cushions with an easy negligence that rather oddly contrasted with the formality of his dress. "I used to wish that Windhorst possessed a lake or river, but now I am glad it has neither. The temptation to idleness would have been irresistible, and I might have still longer continued to indulge in reveries and regrets which ought to have no place in the mind of a Christian minister."

"If that be the case," said Rupert, "I consider it a fortunate circumstance that Windhorst has only a fish-pond. To me a lake brings all sorts of pleasant recollections—reminds me of our vacation-journeys—of Como, Maggiore, even the Mediterranean itself."

"And who," said Englmann, enthusiastically, "who could see this cloudless sky, those sunbeams quivering on the long expanse of water, without recalling such scenes, if they had ever been offered to his youthful eyes, or helped to inflame his boyish imagination!"

Cyrilla's train of thought was broken: she looked up and began to think it possible that the Vicar, when a score of years younger, might have resembled in some degree the portraits so often drawn of him by Melanie. The eyes of which she had heard so much were certainly of the heavenly blue of the sky above them, and there was something visionary in their upturned expression that involuntarily interested her. Unconscious of her observation, he continued: "Those were pleasant journeys, Rupert—days of innocent vanity; we scarcely felt the difference of our ages then."

"Not at all," said Rupert, bending forward to see if it were time to steer for the river. "You were the pleasantest companion possible; and if it had not been for an occasional quotation of Greek or Latin, I should have quite forgotten you were my tutor."

"I am afraid it escaped my memory, too, oftener than it ought," rejoined Englmann, smiling. "Do you remember that time at Como, where the English family supposed me to be your elder brother, and were so very civil to us?"

"Perfectly," answered Rupert, laughing. "They dis-

covered some likeness between me and a fair-haired midshipman, a son of theirs, who by all accounts must have been a still more restless animal than I was. I thought they would never stop shaking our hands, and for my part was in a state of considerable alarm lest the mamma, in a fit of enthusiasm, might be tempted to give me a kiss! At that time I should have resented such a liberty as quite derogatory to my dignity, and I did not at all like having my curls pushed off my forehead, or a hand placed on my shoulder, even by a handsome woman; whereas now, I could submit to caresses of the kind with a very good grace, though but bestowed on me by the stout mother of an unruly midshipman."

Cyrilla smiled. Englmann seemed to be recalling the time more distinctly to his memory. "Yes . . . they were very polite indeed . . . invited us to visit them in England . . . but," he added, with a slightly contemptuous smile, "but they thought I was Baron Adlerkron of Windhorst—supposed me the possessor of your handsome traveling-carriage—saw that our arrival created some sensation, and must have observed the exemplary patience with which the people at the hotel submitted to the nuisance of having the puppies you brought from St Bernhard running all over the house."

"And very well behaved puppies they were," said Rupert, "until the day they got hold of the Englishwoman's bonnet and feathers. Do you recollect their rushing into our rooms, scampering about for a few seconds, and then depositing the mangled spoils at our feet, wagging their tails and looking up for the approbation I did not dare to show because you were present. Those blue feathers nearly choked me as well as the dogs. I never laughed so immoderately in all my life; and I think, too, you were amused, though you thought it necessary to look grave."

"You forget," said Englmann, smiling, "that all the apologies and excuses which were necessary on the occasion fell to my share. I never was so provoked in my life; we could not pay for the damage done, or replace the bonnet, or do anything but offer regrets."

“We made some offering of that kind wherever we went,” said Rupert. “I certainly was a most troublesome boy; but I flatter myself I made up for my juvenile misconduct when, at a later period, we commenced our pedestrian tours. How I enjoyed our wanderings in Tyrol, with straw hats on our heads and knapsacks on our shoulders! Those expeditions elicited the only sparks of poetry in my nature. . . I wrote verses then, didn’t I, Englmann? Wild effusions befitting my age and education.”

“I remember,” he answered; “they were all of a more martial than sentimental description. You were always looking for sites whereon to build impregnable castles, and I trying to discover a nook suitable for the modest edifice, the possession of which would at that time have made me so immeasurably happy.”

“That was the dreamy part of your life,” said Rupert; “it did not last long.”

“Dreams never do; they are supposed only to occupy the moments immediately before waking; but they sometimes make a deep impression, nevertheless; and those to which you allude caused me to take a step that has influenced my whole life.” Not aware of being understood by Cyrilla, he continued, “The wish to have a home to offer to one who would have been an excuse for any other act of thoughtlessness, induced me, without proper reflection, to choose the church as my profession—I should rather say my means of subsistence.”

“But,” said Rupert, “I never imagined that you did so unwillingly.”

“No; I did it willingly, gladly; but my motives were not what they ought to have been. When obliged to resign the being I had so idolized, the fulfilment of my religious duties became a toil to me—my humble dwelling, without the beautiful companion I had hoped would have shared it with me, appeared mean and wretched; in short, I saw the falseness of my position, saw my error when too late, and felt that not only the pomps and vanities of this life had still strong hold on me, but that my natural tem-

perament struggled stubbornly against the restraint imposed on words and actions."

"You judge your motives and yourself with too much severity," said Rupert. "How many others have entered the church in the same way without any of the scruples and repentant humility which you experienced!"

"I trust not many," rejoined Englmann: "no one should choose that profession without having the most decided preference or actual vocation for it: negligence in any other is mere personal worldly loss; but a Christian minister who neglects or is even indifferent in the performance of his duties, endangers not only his own welfare here and hereafter, but that of hundreds of others who naturally look to him for example and instruction."

"My dear Englmann," cried Rupert, "you are talking as if you had been the most worthless of men. Allow me at least to inform my cousin that you are by many degrees the most pious and exemplary vicar that ever the village of Windhorst has possessed."

"I have at least endeavoured to fulfil my duties faithfully," said Englmann, quietly, "and have been rewarded in a way I hardly dared to expect. I am now contented beyond my hopes, and happy beyond my deserts; but not knowing or wishing to try how far I could bear temptation, and being quite convinced that, instead of seeking, I must ever avoid the excitements of society, I find your house much too gay for me, Rupert, and if you have no objection, I shall leave it to-morrow or the day after."

"I have the greatest possible objection," answered Rupert, "and insist on your remaining, were it only to convince Cyrilla that you are not the weak wavering character you have represented yourself to be."

"Avoiding temptation is not weakness," said Englmann.

"But I cannot see even a shadow of temptation for you at Freilands," persisted Rupert.

"Because you don't know my weaknesses, and have not the least idea how I still value the luxuries and enjoy the elegancies of life—how very soon they could again become indispensable to me! The years passed with you, and the

habits acquired in your uncle's house, have caused me more suffering than you can ever imagine ; but, putting myself out of the question, you surely must perceive that, in a house so constantly full of young and gay people as Freilands, I seem, with my reserved manners and peculiar dress, only placed among them like the veiled skeleton at an Egyptian banquet, to call to remembrance what they would all rather forget."

"Perhaps it would be as well if some of them were occasionally subject to a little restraint," said Rupert ; "but as to the peculiarity of your dress, you must allow me to say, that you carry it to excess now. The long hair is something quite new, and not at all necessary."

"I consider it advantageous to remind others, and through them myself, of my vocation."

"But I assure you, Englmann, if such a dress were *de rigueur*, it would be enough to deter many young men from taking orders."

"Those who could be deterred, by *any* peculiarity of dress, from undertaking so sacred an office, had better turn their thoughts to something else."

"You may be right," said Rupert ; "the dress would not have influenced me ; but I believe I should have avoided all extremes, all pedantry, as I now do everything that in any way borders on foppery."

This remark seemed to strike Englmann: Rupert forgot it the moment the words passed his lips. They had turned up the river, and were rowing against its scarcely perceptible current: the banks at first, shaded to the water's edge by fine old trees, afforded a pleasant gloom after the glare of the lake ; for even a cloudless sky and the brightest sunbeams pall on the senses when long enjoyed, and change, even apparently for the worse, is as necessary to us as shade to a picture. The scene was new to Englmann, and he stood up and listened with interest as Rupert explained his plans, pointed to his already reclaimed land, and rejoiced in the growth of his young plantations. By degrees the latter began to dwindle into rather scraggy specimens of marsh-pine, dwarf birch, and

stunted shrubs, intermingled with large patches of heath ; and soon after an apparently endless expanse of brown and purple bog lay before them, the river widened, and the boat glided easily into the waveless shallow waters of a dark-coloured lake, the shores of which were disfigured by an over-luxuriant crop of reeds and bulrushes.

“Is this the source of the river?” asked Englmann.

“No ; the springs, as many of them as we could discover, are further on, where there is another lake even more desolate-looking than this. Here, at least, I have some high ground for my village : the Vehn colonists, you know, are to build beside the road and canals that are to be made through the bog.”

“Cyrilla,” said Rupert, as they stood on the landing-place and looked round them, “you cannot cross these fields to-day, and this is rather a melancholy spot to leave you in . . . suppose you were to row up to the last lake.”

“Which is still more dreary,” said Cyrilla, smiling. “No, I shall sit quietly under the three pollards until you return : it is not the first time I have done so.”

“But you have no book, or any thing to amuse you”

“I do not want amusement. Tell the old fisherman to remain in the boat, and if I get tired of being here, I can go on the lake and look for aquatic plants : so pray do not return a moment sooner than you like, on my account.”





CHAPTER XLVIII.



YRILLA walked towards the pollards. They were but a few yards distant, and stood alone, hideous, yet picturesque; for, strange to say, the last epithet cannot be denied them, so frequently have they been chosen by landscape painters as studies, or to furnish a foreground if not actual picture, with their thin foliage and deformed trunks. Half kneeling on the seat beneath one of them, Cyrilla watched her cousin and his companion, until they disappeared behind the osier-planted dike that fenced the meadows from the encroachments of the water, and then collecting various marsh-plants, she wandered towards the lake, and perceived with great satisfaction that the fisherman, overpowered by heat and recent exertion, was already enjoying a sound sleep in the boat.

The silence of a midsummer noon was around her, and the winged part of the insect world alone seeming fully to enjoy and seek the shadeless heat, buzzed and hummed over the numerous slimy pools of stagnant water in ceaseless inexplicable activity, or with unsullied feet stalked airily on the oozy green surface, until disturbed by some spotted frog that, suddenly rising, spread destruction and terror around him, when darting with gaping mouth and outstretched legs across the pigmean domain.

Dragon-flies and butterflies hovered above the sedges, and over the sleeping old man; and it was when following their vagrant flights, that Cyrilla observed something dark moving along the course of the river. A few moments'

observation convinced her that it was a small boat, and her beating heart told her, long before the outline of the figure became distinct, that the solitary man in it was Zorndorff. Notwithstanding his physician's injunctions that he should avoid violent exercise, he was rowing so energetically, that the little wherry darted through the water with astonishing velocity; and once on the lake, a very few pulls brought him so near the shore that, when at last he paused and looked up, he at once perceived Cyrilla on the bank motionless—expectant.

Whatever thoughts of escape she may have momentarily entertained, none became apparent; and though Zorndorff had known that the rain of the previous day would make the low meadows impassable for her, and had expected to find her nearly where she was, there was so much self-possession, if not resolution, in the erectness of her figure and lightly folded arms, that it caused a sudden and complete change in his feelings and plans. He had followed her in a state of fierce anger, determined to be inexorable—to insist—threaten—intimidate her; and now, more than appeased by her evident willingness to meet him, and half dreading her displeasure, he rowed slowly forward, meditating forms of expostulation and words of entreaty.

As his boat ran alongside of the other, the fisherman raised himself on his elbow, and stared drowsily round him. Zorndorff, with an urbanity not common to him, requested he would not disturb himself—he did not want any assistance—hoped he should be able to overtake Baron Adlerkron, and then sprang up the bank, heedless of the old man's answer, and only intent on having the reeds and rushes between them as soon as possible.

Cyrilla waited until he had joined her, and then led the way to the seat beneath the pollards.

A dead silence ensued.

Zorndorff flung his straw-hat on the ground, and passed his handkerchief several times across his forehead. He wished her to speak, but she sat down silently—her downcast eyes effectually concealing her fears from his inquiring glances.

You will scarcely be surprised at my asking for some notion of what you said to my uncle this morning, Cyrilla?"

"I thought I had been sufficiently explicit," she answered, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Why, yes . . . under any other circumstances . . . but you forget that I have a right to a different kind of answer now."

"I rely upon your written promise, and abide by my answer."

"But do you think that, without a gleam of hope, I can go on for ever enduring the restraint and jealousy you have made me suffer lately?" asked Zorndorff, with ill-concealed irritation, as he sat down beside her.

A bitter sarcasm trembled on Cyrilla's lips. She did not give it utterance, but the sudden movement, indignant look, half-opened mouth—and then the listless sinking back against the tree, were too expressive to be misunderstood; and Zorndorff, after a moment's hesitation, in low eager words of entreaty, begged her to forgive the past and believe in his sincere repentance. He would submit to any trial, wait any length of time, on condition that she would put an end to the hopes of Lindesmar, and whoever else aspired to her favour, by openly acknowledging, or allowing it to be understood, that she was engaged to him.

"Margaret is not yet three months in her grave . . ." began Cyrilla.

"Pshaw!" he cried impetuously, "I do not want you to proclaim it to the world. I only ask you to speak to me, look at me, distinguish me, a little more than any one else . . . only just enough to let people suppose . . . O, Cyrilla, you want no instruction on these subjects. I never saw any woman who could show a preference more charmingly than you can."

"It is rather difficult to conceal where it exists," she answered; "but I no longer feel, and will not feign it."

"What!" he exclaimed. "Have I heard you rightly? Say that over again."

Cyrilla repeated her words distinctly, adding, that she

hoped they might induce him to consent to at least constant separation—the only favour she would henceforward request of him; and she trusted that time would make the tie that connected them as irksome to him as it had long been to her.

Utterly hopeless of moving him, and rendered desperate by her wretchedness, there was a decision in her manner so new to Zorndorff, that he gazed at her in astonishment for some moments; and then the possibility that he had tried her affection and patience quite beyond endurance began at last to enter his mind—the mere idea of renewed separation making her dearer to him than ever. He reasoned, expostulated, and entreated, with an ardour and earnestness that could not have been heard unmoved, had she become merely indifferent to him; but fear and aversion were working so strongly within her, that though she partly succeeded in concealing the former, the latter was so perfectly evident, as she drew back with a shudder when he attempted to put his arm round her, that he stood up, and making a violent effort to appear composed, said slowly,—

“You seem altogether to forget our relation to each other . . . remember that no barrier now exists between us.”

“I trust there is still an insuperable one,” said Cyrilla—“your own interest. You are not likely to proclaim yourself a bigamist, or resign your wife’s fortune for a woman who has altogether ceased to care for you.”

“For that last contingency I have sedulously provided by remittances to America,” he answered, calmly; “and once there, Cyrilla, I shall concern myself very little about my reputation here.”

This answer overwhelmed her, and it was long before she could falter: “Still—I rely on your promise of forbearance—for even the most unprincipled men have some vague ideas of *honour*!”

Zorndorff turned away, and seemed moved to an extent that he did not wish her to observe; but with true feminine quickness, she perceived it, and a gleam of hope

passed across her mind, as she added; "I can scarcely think that you will secure your own happiness by wrecking mine so completely."

"It is your own fault, Cyrilla," he exclaimed, vehemently.

"True; but not the less hard to be borne on that account."

"You mistake me; I did not refer to our marriage," he said, quickly: "much as we have both suffered, I have never regretted that for one moment. If you cannot pardon, and will not acknowledge it now—it is your fault, not mine. You trust to time—so will I. Remain as you are, if such be your desire, and I shall endeavour to bear with resignation this temporary loss of your affection, considering it a due punishment for my—offence."

"Your *crime*," said Cyrilla, angry and disappointed at being deprived of the last hope to which she had unconsciously clung.

"Be it so," he answered, approaching her closely, "be it so; but to conceal one crime men often commit another; and," he added, in the low and terribly distinct tones of suppressed passion, "and if you will not be *my* wife—by God!—you shall never be that of any other man."

"You need not swear," she said, shrinking visibly; "I see that I must submit . . . death itself . . . anything is preferable to being your wife."

"Recall those words, Cyrilla. You may wish them unspoken when it is too late. Do not drive me to extremities."

At this moment, they both perceived Rupert advancing towards them with long strides. From the roof of one of the houses, where he had mounted to inspect the rafters, he had seen that Cyrilla was not alone, and instantly suspecting that Zorndorff had followed her, he rushed across the swampy fields, in the hope of saving her from an interview she had so evidently wished to avoid. One glance convinced him that he had arrived too late; but, without bestowing any attention on Zorndorff's angry mien, he sprang up the bank to Cyrilla, stooped, and

whispered eagerly : " May I not speak—may I not interfere now ? "

" No, no, no, " she cried, anxiously ; " we have had, I trust, our final explanation : it was necessary, and I ought not to have tried to avoid it. "

" Adlerkron, " said Zorndorff, turning haughtily to Rupert ; " I am aware that you have heard of your cousin's promise—engagement, in fact, to me. As her nearest relation, you ought to be informed also, that I never will cede any of the rights she has given me. "

" Not even if she should avow a preference for some one else ? " asked Rupert.

Zorndorff's instant start convinced Cyrilla that the actual probability of such a thing had never really entered his mind until that moment. As he strode forward, with a fierce gesture, she sprang from her seat, exclaiming ; " Edouard, I entreat—O, Rupert, what have you said ? "

Perhaps it was a fortunate circumstance that terror just then produced a sudden faintness, and that, appalled by the overpowering sensation of momentarily increasing weakness, she was obliged to lean against the trunk of the nearest tree for support. First pressing her hands to her eyes, and then pushing back her hair from her colourless face, she looked so wildly round her, as effectually to silence her companions, and fix the attention of both on her exclusively.

With a deep sigh, she once more sat down ; and no sooner had a faint tinge of red begun to colour her lips, than Zorndorff stood erect before her, his eyes flashing, while he asked, " Is this true ? "

She covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

" Zorndorff, " cried Rupert, angrily ; " I cannot allow you to annoy my cousin in this manner. You have no right. "

" Have I not ? " said Zorndorff, appealing to Cyrilla.

Her answer was a fresh burst of tears.

" Incomprehensible ! " exclaimed Rupert ; " excepting, " he added, looking steadily at Zorndorff, " excepting, as I have all along suspected, you are taking advantage of some religious scruple on her part. "

“Precisely,” said Zorndorff, who seemed to have regained all his usual cynical composure; “and I shall continue to do so as the only means of obtaining what has now become my first object in life.”

“But,” cried Rupert, beginning to get exasperated; “this scruple, if sufficiently well-founded to bind her even now, ought surely to have prevented you from marrying?”

“I wish to heaven it had!” cried Zorndorff, with a sudden burst of natural feeling, that changed the whole expression of his face. “I would rather have grovelled in poverty all my life than have heard what Cyrilla has said to me this day.”

“But having heard it,” said Rupert, “there is but one course for you to pursue.”

Cyrilla said nothing, but she looked up through her tears, and watched his countenance with the deepest anxiety. A violent internal struggle was evident as Zorndorff walked backwards and forwards before them. He first muttered a few angry ejaculations, and then spoke: “No, Adlerkron—it cannot be—you do not know the sacrifice you expect from me. She is mine—and mine she must remain. Once for all, she shall not—can not—dare not even *think* of any one but me.”

“Cyrilla,” cried Rupert, in a voice trembling with passion; “must I—must you listen to this without contradiction?”

“She cannot contradict it,” said Zorndorff, calmly; “but I have promised forbearance and—silence, trusting that beyond a certain point my patience will not be tried. Understand me rightly, Cyrilla,” he continued, approaching her: “A home and something more than a competence awaits me in America; but—I will not emigrate—alone.”

“O, anything—anything but that!” cried Cyrilla, in a voice of anguish.

Rupert, completely bewildered, looked from one to the other. He breathed shortly and audibly.

“I do not ask,” added Zorndorff, with a good deal of emphasis, “but I recommend you to be as silent as I have promised to be. More than your own fate depends on

your words and actions for the next few months ; and as I shall leave Freilands to-day, excuse my taking advantage of this opportunity to request that these rides, and rows, and rambles with your cousin, may henceforward cease altogether: now that I know the nature of your feelings towards him, you can scarcely expect me to permit them any longer." He turned to leave them as he ceased speaking.

"Stay," cried Rupert, impetuously—"stay until I have asked Cyrilla if she will submit to being spoken to in this manner."

"O yes, yes," she said, hastily, alarmed at Rupert's violence. "Let him say what he pleases. I will submit to anything rather than—than—Oh, God, how unhappy I am!" she exclaimed, bursting into fresh tears, "and all— all my own fault!"

"There is some dreadful mystery—some secret here which I ought to know," said Rupert, turning to Zorndorff, "and I must insist on being told it without delay or circumlocution."

"From me you shall never hear it," answered Zorndorff, haughtily. "I leave Cyrilla to confide as much or as little as she pleases to you: she knows what the consequences will be;" and, without waiting to see the effect of his words, he sprang down the bank and disappeared in a moment.

"I have heard strange words," said Rupert, in a constrained voice. "May I hope that you will make them intelligible to me?"

"Impossible, Rupert."

"Then you are really, as he gave me to understand, completely in his power?"

"Oh, so completely that I must obey him—and—give you up for ever."

"I suppose it must be so," he rejoined, gloomily, and then stood with his arms folded, and his eyes bent on the ground, beside her in silence for some minutes. The result of his meditations was not of a satisfactory nature. There was something glacial in his manner and voice as he abruptly asked, "What are your plans for the future?"

“ I thought of going to Fernanda, but he has told Melanie that he will follow me.”

“ I doubt his doing so,” said Rupert, “ now that he has accomplished our separation. Besides, it would avail him little. Fernanda is not Melanie: a handsome face and person is no passport to her favour; and what she has heard from you will be sufficient to close her doors against him irrevocably.”

“ She has not heard much from me” began Cyrilla.

“ What! Have you not told Fernanda all?”

“ I had not courage. She would have despised me for my weakness and folly, and then insisted on my acting in a manner which, though it might have satisfied her ideas of right and honour, would have made me even more wretched than I am.”

Rupert started forward, grasped her arm, and looked inquiringly in her face; but as she raised her eyes to his, with a melancholy yet perfectly unembarrassed gaze, his features suddenly relaxed. He blushed deeply, and perceiving that she expected him to speak, said hurriedly: “ There is no hope of our understanding each other, Cyrilla. I am plain-spoken to a fault; you seem made up of mystery. We must part, and for both our sakes the sooner the better.”

“ Shall I ask Melanie to leave Freilands before the time she intended?” asked Cyrilla, timidly.

“ No; that might create an unnecessary sensation in Exfort. We can avoid each other for the remaining fortnight that we shall be under the same roof. None but the Bellegardes will observe it—they will suppose that we have quarrelled”

“ But we have not, Rupert—we have not?” she asked, deprecatingly. “ Oh, my dear cousin, say that you will at least continue to be my friend.”

“ Your friend!” he repeated, with a forced laugh; “ assuredly your friend, and ever ready to be employed in your service.”

Just then Englmann’s approach was observed by both with feelings of relief. Cyrilla turned away to hide her

face, on which the traces of recent grief were still evident. Whatever reproaches the Vicar might have intended to make for having been so unceremoniously deserted, they found no utterance. He pretended not to observe the agitation of his companions; but, walking quietly to the boat, followed by the fisherman's son, he spread out the school-house plans on his knee, and did not even look up as they passed him, when taking their places under the awning. Rupert's answers to his first remarks were terribly confused. Afterwards, however, having apologized for his inattention, he seemed determined to force or feign an interest, and actually succeeded in speaking very rationally and calmly, while Cyrilla, wrapped in her sorrow, leaned back, and gazed vacantly along the glittering water, unheeding of their conversation. Suddenly her attention was arrested by Rupert's lowering his voice, so as not to be heard by the boatmen. He said that he was about to leave Freilands for many years, and greatly wished that the Vicar would take charge of his Vehn colony—that he would build him a house—give him a large tract of land—do anything, in short, that would be an inducement to him. And Englmann raised no difficulties. He spoke of "home missions," "happy consciousness of not having lived altogether unprofitably," and—consulting his wife.

Grief makes us selfish. As Cyrilla walked on before them to the house, the loss of Rupert's presence, energy, and boundless generosity to his colonists, appeared trifling in comparison to what *she* must suffer when deprived of his society and accustomed attentions. The continuation of these would have enabled her to have gone on for years in that sort of melancholy uncertainty so often patiently endured by her sex, so intolerable to his. Women are so imaginative, especially in youth, that there are few who have not composed some mournful romance, in which, naturally reserving the most interesting part for themselves, they are loving, heartless, proud, generous, vindictive, or forgiving, precisely as these qualities preponderate in their character. Were these flights of fancy honestly

confessed, what an unfolding of disposition were there ! As a proof of stronger and more healthy imagination, we may consider the setting aside of themselves, extending their views, and making others to will, to do, and to suffer. There is little reason to doubt that many do so, and are as unconsciously authors of fiction as M. Jourdain was a speaker of prose.

Cyrilla, in imagination, then saw Rupert leave Freilands ; went through the parting interview with horrible minuteness. He was at Berlin, Vienna, Constantinople, and Jerusalem, as quickly as she walked pensively a few slow steps. He wrote letters from Lebanon, and let his beard grow—Alexandria—Lloyd steamboats and Italy. He is coming home—she will see him again ; but . . . Virginie meets him at St. Bernhard . . . or somewhere . . . anywhere . . . and tells him of her love that had commenced in childhood, and gone on increasing since with every year. And Rupert had seen no face he knew, and heard no voice familiar to his ear for years. What wonder, then, that he . . . he should . . . yes, they were married, and he was returning to Freilands . . . they were driving to the door . . . and she was but one of the many friends assembled to meet them !

Her senses had greatly aided this hasty conclusion. The sound of rapidly trotting horses and rolling carriage-wheels had reached her ear ; and, before she could answer Melanie's request, eagerly made from one of the windows, that "she would come up stairs for a few minutes," Klemmhein's phaeton, with Madame de Bellegarde in it, drove to the door. In a rather hurried and conscious manner, the latter informed Rupert that Virginie had gone into Exfort to expedite a letter of importance to Italy ; that Victor had refused to come with them, because he had not yet recovered the disappointment about the lost appointment ; and that Henri was in such execrable humour, she was glad to escape from him. "But, my dear Cyrilla," she added, turning suddenly round, "do you know that the children are waiting for you all this time at the ford, where you promised to meet them ?"

“I suppose,” she continued, appealing to Rupert, “there is no danger there, though the water is rather high? I ask, because Hortense is with them.”

“No danger,” replied Rupert, “but every probability of their slipping into the water and being wet, if not frightened. I think, Englmann, we had better go for them.”

Madame de Bellegarde not being able to discover what possible use she could be at the ford, and having satisfied her maternal anxiety by providing some one to assist her daughter over the inundated stepping-stones, turned into the lime-tree walk with Klemmhein, while Melanie, following Cyrilla, whispered in an uneasy, hurried manner, “I have seen Edouard, and heard all. Heaven only knows what the consequences of your confession will be. He said he had been less jealous of Rupert latterly than of Count Lindesmar; so if you had only preserved the secret of your unfortunate preference, all might still have gone on quietly.”

“I scarcely remember how it was betrayed,” said Cyrilla, dejectedly. “They seemed to understand each other’s looks. But it is of little importance. . . this day has separated me from both for ever. Rupert intends to travel, and I shall go to Fernanda.”

“I believe,” said Melanie, thoughtfully, “it is the best arrangement that can be made. Time may yet set all to rights, and the climate of Italy do wonders for you.”

“Oh, Melanie, how can you talk so lightly!”

“But, dear Cyrilla,” rejoined Melanie, a little embarrassed; “when you hear that Rupert has got over *his* disappointment, which, believe me, he will with astonishing facility, you surely do not mean to go on pining in this way. No health—no constitution could bear it.”

“I shall not pine for what I cannot obtain,” said Cyrilla, with a faint smile; “and you may be quite sure of my making every exertion to overcome all useless regrets. Fernanda’s society will be of essential service to me; and witnessing her happiness will, I hope, indemnify me in some measure for the loss of my own.”

When they reached the ford, Rupert was just springing over the large stones, which, though covered with water, were still visible. Englmann was about to follow, when Tina called out from the other side of the stream, "Don't wet your feet, papa; it will make you ill. I can get over quite well alone;" and, quickly drawing off her shoes and stockings, she danced along the grassy bank, and dabbled with her small white feet in the water.

"You are a good, considerate little girl," said Rupert, with a smile. "Pertl, make haste, and follow her example. You can scarcely expect me to carry you over, I should think. Come, Hortense," he added, carelessly throwing his arm round the tall, blushing girl; "keep your feet out of the water as well as you can, and don't pretend to get giddy as you did the last time I carried you."

The children followed them, and their eager jumps from stone to stone were watched with interest by Englmann, Melanie, and Cyrilla. As they sat down afterwards on the grass, Hortense pointed with her long, narrow, gray-booted foot to Tina's shoes, remarking superciliously, "You need not have carried them in your hand; they are strong enough to bear the water—quite boy's shoes!"

"Very good shoes," said the little girl, composedly.

"O, no doubt; and the stockings, too . . . but they are rather coarse . . . I wonder they don't hurt your feet."

"Hurt me!" cried Tina, indignantly. "Mamma knit them."

"Why didn't she knit some for Pertl, too? he has none at all!" said Hortense, deridingly.

This was a fact which no one else had observed. The boy's face became crimson. A painful flush, too, passed over his father's features; and then he bent down, and whispered, "Have you none, my son?"

"I have . . . I have . . ." he answered, with difficulty restraining tears of vexation; "but mamma told me to save them until I returned to school; and I thought no one here would know . . . and no one would have seen . . . if that nasty girl . . ."

"Pertl!" said his father, reproachfully.

"She's always laughing at Tina about her dress; and Jérôme and Lucian say that I am a plebeian, because I have not velvet jackets like theirs. I don't like any of the Bellegardes."

"Well, put on your boots, and don't talk any more about it," said his father, perceiving that the cousins had walked on together.

"Cyrilla . . . I mean to say, Melanie," began Rupert, as soon as he was out of hearing, "I have been shamefully negligent about these children. Will you have the kindness to take them to-morrow into Exfort, and order whatever clothes they may want?"

"With pleasure," said Melanie; "a little dress would certainly improve Tina. She is fresh-looking, and can wear blue. What do you think of a round hat, with blue ribbon rosettes, and . . ."

"Anything you please," said Rupert. "I dare say they both want a lot of things, and have been desired by their parents not to let me observe it. Pertl, poor fellow! has actually but one jacket, I believe."

"I am afraid I cannot manage for him. I don't like—I mean I don't understand anything about boys, or their coats, or . . . or . . ."

"Will you trust me?" asked Cyrilla, gently. "I am almost sure that I know exactly what you mean."

Rupert's answer was inaudible, for his lips were pressed to her hand; and, as he raised his head, his eyes were full of tears.

A moment afterwards he was playing with Pertl, drawing his straw hat over his face, until the sun-burnt crown was forced completely upwards.

The boy looked dismayed.

"Never mind," whispered Tina; "I can sew it for you when we get home."

"No," said Rupert; "he shall have a new one to-morrow. I think I want one myself, too," he added, taking his own off his head and twirling it on his hand; "it has scarcely the form of a hat since Alphonse made a boat of it!"



CHAPTER XLIX.



YRILLA saw intuitively the line of conduct that Rupert wished her to adopt; and as he became graver, quieter, and more occupied than ever, his consultations with Englmann and visits to the marsh still more frequent, she, in unobtrusive imitation of his example, finished the drawings for the President's album, drove with Melanie to Exfort and Neuhof, and took long walks with the children; but the constant exertion in such warm weather only served to add languor to the depression of mind consequent on her total estrangement from Rupert, and soon even began to undermine her health in a manner that no effort on her part could altogether conceal.

Virginie, informed by Zorndorff of all that had occurred, and instantly perceiving that the cousins now mutually avoided each other, resolved to take advantage of the opportunity to insinuate herself still more into Rupert's confidence and favour. He could not repulse her, or even show his indifference as he had done at first; for she had to a certain extent placed herself under his protection, by remaining at Freilands after the day on which she had accepted pecuniary assistance from him. In a quiet, scarcely perceptible manner, he had since then been obliged to defend her from the haughty tolerance of Melanie, and the not less mortifying cold politeness of Cyrilla, who both, while exhibiting their virtuous indignation, and using that power of tormenting which the former so fluently condemned as the cause of most of the misery in this world,

forgot that they were giving a proud and vindictive woman an additional incentive to pursue the course she meditated. Unconsciously, too, but most effectually, they had assisted in forwarding her deeply laid plans; for, convinced at length that she could not obtain from Rupert more than the interest and regard he had ever professed and shown for her, she now placed all her hopes on his niece, perhaps exaggerated, ideas of honour; and would have willingly borne the contumely of the whole world, provided that he could have been made to see and feel that she was exposed to it, and even in the remotest degree attach blame to himself. Of the result in that case she was certain.

The day before Englmann and his children left Freilands, Cyrilla took a last very long walk with them. It was the beginning of August, the weather unusually sultry even for that time of year, and she was afterwards proportionally fatigued; but the Bellegardes came to spend the evening—exertion was necessary—it was made, and not the slightest flagging of spirits or lassitude was suffered to become apparent. She consoled the children, when taking leave, by promising to see them in the morning, and accompanied them out of the drawing-room when they went to bed; but on returning to it through the music-room, which had latterly been quite deserted, and was then but faintly lighted by the lamps from the other apartments, she threw herself on one of the low luxuriously-cushioned divans, intending to rest for a quarter of an hour, and . . . overcome by weakness and weariness, fell fast asleep.

The departure of the Bellegardes, inquiries about herself, and surmises as to the probability of her having gone to bed, with all the unavoidable commotion of separating for the night, failed to waken her, though it may have disturbed, and perhaps assisted in making more vivid her confused dreams of wandering on marshy ground in pursuit of Rupert and Virginie, followed closely by Zorndorff, from whom she in vain endeavoured to escape. The comparative tranquillity that followed would in all probability have made her slumbers more profound, had not soon after the sound of the very voices she expected to hear become sud-

denly audible, and it seemed a continuation of her dream, as she heard Rupert with some vehemence exclaim, "Virginie, I insist on an explanation of these words; such insinuations are unpardonable if they are not well founded Speak What has Zorndorff said to you?"

"Nothing I will never name Cyrilla again if you do not wish it," she answered, deprecatingly.

"I do wish it—I must, and will know what you mean!"

"Only what I said, dear Rupert only what I said that a mere promise need not be kept secret, no matter how solemn it may be. Why should not the President be told and consulted? Why should not you know all the particulars, if there were not (to say the least) some *very* unusual cause for silence."

Cyrilla rose. She knew now that she was not dreaming that Virginie was with Rupert in the large drawing-room; she saw through the open doorways that the lamps were still burning there, though they had been extinguished in the intervening room. With the quickness of lightning she recollected, too, that Virginie was in the habit of remaining every night to speak some additional words to Rupert; that once or twice, when she had descended the stairs with her and Melanie, she had returned to seek a forgotten handkerchief or book; and these nocturnal *tête-à-têtes* were taken advantage of to poison his mind against *her* in the most ungenerous manner. Yet she could not explain, could not attempt to contradict what she had heard; for, alas! it was but too true that "there was a very unusual cause for silence."

As these ideas passed through Cyrilla's mind, she prepared to leave the room unobserved as she had entered it, when her attention was attracted by hearing a half-stifled exclamation of astonishment, followed by a few words of inquiry about herself, uttered hastily by her sister. "She is not in her room," added Melanie, "and no one has seen her since the children went to bed two hours ago."

Cyrilla turned back, saying, "I am here, Melanie, and have been sleeping on the sofa in the music-room."

Her appearance seemed to complete the consternation of

Virginie; she shaded her already downcast eyes with her hand, and endeavoured to sink still further back in her chair. Rupert bit his lip and looked vexed; but the milder feeling changed into something nearly approaching to anger, as Melanie swept past him, and drawing Cyrilla's arm within hers, said in a low but perfectly distinct voice, "Come, dearest—we are evidently *de trop* here!"

Virginie glanced furtively towards Rupert, and then covered her face with her hands, apparently overwhelmed with dismay at the implied reproach. He stood at a little distance, trying to overcome his irritation and hide his embarrassment by lighting the candle she had deliberately extinguished half an hour before; and then, with some hesitation, said, "Excuse my reminding you, Virginie, that you have brought this annoyance on yourself. I have repeatedly . . . objected to . . . I mean, that much as I enjoy your society . . . I have ever wished you to avoid doing anything that . . . Pshaw! . . . you know what I want to say."

"I know that you have ever been most kind, most considerate," answered Virginie, looking up suddenly, while shaking her head in a very distracted manner. "I have borne much from both your cousins lately," she added, rising; "and would bear more, Rupert, in order to be near you; but after what has just occurred, I cannot remain longer in this house."

"Nor can I urge you," said Rupert, a good deal moved at her distress, though doubtful if it were altogether genuine.

"I see," she began, with some bitterness, "you are tired of me . . ."

"Not so," he cried eagerly; "you quite misunderstand me; and, indeed, on consideration, perhaps it would be better if you were to remain here until our party breaks up finally. I shall explain everything satisfactorily to Melanie to-morrow."

"Do not attempt it; she will not believe you. I have long perceived that she imputes the most odious and sordid motives to all my actions; but you, who have known me

from earliest infancy, judge me otherwise, I trust. You know my innocence—you know that my affection for you has grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength—you know that it is of a deeper, stronger nature than Melanie has ever even dreamed. Rupert," she added, solemnly approaching him; "before we part, say that you at least have never doubted this—that, with all my faults and follies, you have never suspected me of ignoble thoughts or worldly speculations."

"Never for a moment," said Rupert, warmly.

"Say also . . . if you can . . . that you have not learned utterly to despise me for my . . . weakness."

O, well Virginia knew, as she pronounced these words, that no man ever despised a woman for having a too sensible perception of his excellences, whether of mind or person, or both; and Rupert formed no exception to the general rule. He did not despise at all the companion of his youth for so decided a proof of intellect and discernment; and had he been quite sure that her graceful attitude of anxious inquiry was unstudied, he might have answered more at length, and more appropriately; but even what he said was sufficient to move his hearer more than he expected or wished, and he was obliged to add, "Now, pray, dear Virginia, be rational, and do not work yourself into a useless state of excitement."

"You need not fear it, I am past all that now," she answered, almost in a whisper; "I have nothing more to hope or fear, gain or lose in this world."

As the light of the candle she then raised from the table fell strongly on her face, he perceived that her features were fixed and livid. This could not be acting, and he said, gently, "Believe me, Virginia, I am at this moment far more unhappy than you are. You have your child, your mother, sisters, brother—many to love and care for you—my hopes were all centred in one, and my lot has been the bitterest disappointment."

"Forget it," said Virginia, without looking up; "forget her, and be happy again . . . as happy as you deserve to be . . . more I cannot wish you . . . and now, adieu."

“Good-night,” said Rupert.

“Adieu,” she repeated, with emphasis; “I shall leave Freilands to-morrow; and as I have resolved to go to my father-in-law, we are not likely to meet again for years—if ever. Will you not say, farewell? Before your cousins to-morrow, I know you dare not show regard for one so forlorn and worthless as I am.”

Rupert half smiled, while he assured her that their presence should be no restraint whatever on him: and he kept his word, for when, the next day, Virginie, with a timidity half affected, half real, took leave of them, Melanie’s frigid dignity and Cyrilla’s scarcely concealed dislike so provoked him, that he fairly embraced her in their presence, kissing from her flushed cheeks the unrestrained tears of resentment and mortification.

Silence seemed to fall on the house as she left it. The Bellegardes came not that day or the following; and just when their unity was completely destroyed, the small family party found themselves alone for the first time. The President, indeed, seemed perfectly satisfied with the tranquillity around him: to him the discontent of his companions never became apparent. Rupert politely, the others carefully endeavoured to conceal it from him during the few hours he daily spent with them: but to each other the case was different; and though Rupert’s efforts to appear cheerful, and the necessary attentions to his cousins were unremitting, they saw his struggles, and to relieve him from the constraint which they more than suspected their presence caused him, began to drive into Exfort every morning, and spent the greater part of the day there or at Neuhol. Virginie, perfectly aware of the advantages of silence on most occasions, had entered into no explanation with any of her family; and they all concurred in applauding her resolution to reside with her father-in-law, while jestingly hinting that she would only do so until her finances were recruited. To Rupert, Madame de Bellegarde regretted the exaggerated delicacy of feeling which had induced her sister to decline General Kersdorff’s proposal. “Henri and I,” she added, “used all our eloquence

to persuade her. It would have been so pleasant for us, you know, and Virginie might have continued to reside here, and enjoy without interruption the society of those she . . . most likes."

His answer was so guarded that she could not remember it when she wrote to Virginie; but she mentioned that he looked unhappy and harassed; and that both Melanie and Cyrilla would willingly leave Freilands if the President were not determined to stay there until the exact day appointed for the termination of his visit when he had accepted the invitation.

This was true—and she might have added, they both wished to leave Exfort also; and that even the prospect of going to Aix was spoken of with satisfaction—Melanie openly expressing her hopes that change of air and scene would be of use to her sister's health, which had latterly begun to decline in an alarming manner.

Cyrilla herself never complained of suffering, either bodily or mental; she seemed at last to have acquired the most perfect resignation, avoiding, even when alone with Melanie, all reference to the past, all anticipations of the future; but, while enduring with fortitude the sorrow she had brought upon herself, she deeply deplored the share she had imposed on Rupert, whose feverish restlessness, as the time of separation drew near, was painful to witness.

Nor was Zorndorff happy in his successful villany. Continually tormented with doubts and suspicions of the most complicated description, he greatly regretted his harsh threats at the termination of the last interview with Cyrilla; longed ardently for an opportunity of conciliating her, and consequently looked forward with impatience to the return of the Falkensteins to Exfort, in order to have her once more in his uncle's house, where he hoped, by patience and devotion, to remove the fears he had so evidently inspired. His consternation and annoyance were greater than can easily be imagined, when one day informed by Klemmhein that, as Rupert's leave of absence had been prolonged, it was supposed the President would

consent to remain some time longer with him. Almost angrily, Zorndorff insisted that his uncle would certainly return on the 12th—he was sure that nothing would induce him to change his plans, as he had important business to transact before he went to Aix. His informant, perfectly indifferent on the subject, was soon convinced that he had been mistaken; but a doubt so provoking remained on Zorndorff's own mind, that, unwilling as he was to enter the precincts of Freilands, he sought and found an excuse for doing so, and the following day rode there at an early hour, apologizing, as he drew up his horse before the breakfast-room window, where his uncle was sitting, for being obliged to disturb him with business even on a Sunday morning.

Rupert and Cyrilla, who had changed colour with equal rapidity at the unexpected sound of his voice, rose at the same moment, intending to leave the room, had not the President, from consideration for the latter, passed them quickly, and joining his nephew in the hall, retired with him to a seat under one of the trees on the lawn.

Cyrilla sat down again, Rupert walked to one of the windows, just in time to see a soldier of his regiment give a letter to one of the servants, and merely saying, "No answer," touch his cap and ride off again.

The letter was brought to Rupert, who observed, as he opened it, "From Maier! If he want another day's shooting, I shall put him off until next week, Cyrilla, as I know both you and Melanie dislike him."

"Not exactly," she answered, hesitatingly; "but his appearance is unprepossessing, and made a disagreeable impression on us the first time we saw him."

"He is not handsome, certainly," said Rupert, "nor are any of the family; his brother Caspar was even plainer, and Zorndorff completed his ugliness, by giving him a sabre wound in a duel that left a scar on his face he will carry to his grave. Poor fellow, that same scar greatly increased his difficulties, when he was endeavouring to escape to America three years ago. He was some weeks concealed at Spa, while descriptions of him and it were in

all the newspapers. Ah, here is a letter from him, the first I have received since his expatriation, enclosed to his brother, and dated nearly two months ago. But what is all this about? Statement of facts—confession—Zorndorff—Spa . . . ”

Cyrilla understood it all. The clergyman who had met them at Spa was Captain Maier's brother—Rupert knew him well, perhaps intimately, and his letter would disclose all she had endeavoured so carefully to conceal.

It did so. The young man, having learned from his brother that Rupert was supposed to be engaged to his cousin Mademoiselle d'Adlerkron, had considered himself bound in honour to write him a full account of all that had occurred at the Geronstère spring. He informed him also of the manner in which he had been subsequently employed by Zorndorff, of his purchases of land and houses, of a projected flight to America with Cyrilla von Adlerkron had his wife lived, and every other circumstance calculated to throw light on a transaction, which, he assured Rupert, he never would have been accessory to, had not Zorndorff solemnly promised to renew the vows so fraudulently made, as soon as the necessary legal arrangements could be completed.

Rupert's amazement and indignation while reading this letter almost deprived him of breath, and before he had half finished it, he looked at Cyrilla, and, murmuring the words, "Unhappy girl!" rushed into the adjoining room, where she heard him striding up and down, uttering violent exclamations for some minutes. The moment she approached the door, he threw himself into a chair, and placing his arms on the table before him, hid his face in his hands.

She stood beside him for a few moments silently; then, placing her hand on his shoulder, faltered, "You know all now, Rupert?"

"All—all—more than you do," he answered, without looking up.

"And you understand my motives for secrecy, and will not increase my misery by telling the President, or quarrelling with—Count Zorndorff."

Rupert's hands balled themselves convulsively as she pronounced the name.

"Is there—no hope—of release for me—without—his crime and my folly being made public?" she asked in a whisper.

Rupert raised himself, and without looking at her, said slowly, "You must not think of it, Cyrilla; my duty now compels me to urge you to fulfil your engagement to Zorndorff—it is the only reparation he can make for his atrocious conduct."

"I will not accept a reparation which, in itself, would be a punishment greater than even my fault deserves," she said, quickly.

"You will judge differently when I have pointed out to you the true state of the case," continued Rupert, gravely. "Zorndorff, in order to secure his own impunity, has placed you in the most painful position that it is possible to imagine. He purposely, as I firmly believe, neglected all the necessary forms, omitted to apply for the requisite permission, chose a foreign country, for Spa is beyond our frontiers, and, in short, did everything that could take even a shadow of legality from the act which was to bind him to you."

"I did not know that a marriage contracted in a foreign country was less binding than in one's own," said Cyrilla, thoughtfully. "Melanie is very ignorant of such matters; I am if possible more so; and we did not venture to ask any one who could have given us information."

"Few women understand such things," said Rupert, bitterly; "and therefore they cannot too carefully avoid all clandestine transactions."

Cyrilla received this as a well deserved reproof, and attempted no defence.

A long pause ensued—it was broken at last by Rupert observing, with very evident embarrassment, "I don't think you understand me, Cyrilla."

"O yes, perfectly," she said, quietly. "I am quite aware that our marriage was irregular, and the usual forms neglected. The clergyman himself recommended, and

Melanie always said, that another and more public ceremony must take place at a later period."

"And you—and Zorndorff thought so, too?" asked Rupert, breathlessly, as he snatched her hand and drew her towards him.

"Of course; but there was no time to discuss the matter, as we were separated immediately afterwards by his father and the President, who followed us to Spa, and would not even consent to our speaking to each other for a few minutes alone. The next time we met was the evening of my return to Exfort, and then another wife was standing beside him!"

"O, Cyrilla," he cried, springing joyfully from his chair; "there is happiness in store for us yet! This marriage is beyond all doubt illegal; and I may now tell you without restraint or hesitation, that the duel with Zorndorff, or rather the cause of it, prevented Caspar Maier from ever being ordained; so that he had no more right to perform a marriage ceremony than I have, and the whole affair was nothing but a disgraceful, dishonourable fraud!"

While Rupert, with sparkling eyes and eager fluency, continued his explanations, and told her how Maier had afterwards studied medicine, and was now practising as a physician at Cincinnati, and how Zorndorff had purchased large tracts of land there, intending that she should cross the Atlantic with him, even during his wife's lifetime, Cyrilla stood motionless—speechless—hardly daring to rejoice; so greatly shocked was she at the extent of Zorndorff's treachery, so fearful that a man so unscrupulous might even yet find some way to mar her prospects of happiness.

At length the subject was exhausted, and Rupert spoke not less eloquently of himself. Then it was that Cyrilla felt her freedom, and yielded to the natural joyful buoyancy of her disposition without reserve. At his request all the particulars of the unfortunate transaction that had so embittered three years of her life were related; after which he made her dwell long upon her change of feelings, and the commencement of her affection for him; and charmed

with the blushing, half-willing, half-reluctant confession, might have continued still longer to question eagerly and listen delightedly, had not a glance towards the window showed them Zorndorff taking a lingering leave of his uncle, while his eyes wandered along the façade of the house. Rupert returned to the breakfast-room, and opening the door, desired the porter to request Count Zorndorff to come to him for a few minutes, as soon as he was disengaged.

“Rupert . . . dear Rupert . . . you are not, I trust, going to say or do anything that can provoke a quarrel? Spare him all unnecessary irritation . . . for my sake, for yours, say nothing of our plans for the future . . . or . . .”

“What! continued secrecy, Cyrilla?”

“I only meant for the next week or two; and if you have no objection, I should like to speak to him alone now.”

“I have a very decided objection to giving him an opportunity of again intimidating you.”

“Thank goodness, he can do so no more,” said Cyrilla.

“Yet a few threats of taking vengeance on me might still have some effect,” rejoined Rupert, as he bent down his head to hers and looked archly into her eyes.

Cyrilla turned pale at the very idea, and at that moment the door opened and Zorndorff entered.

He slightly frowned and drew himself up, as he approached them, saying: “There is some mistake, perhaps . . . I was told you wished to speak to me . . .”

“I did . . . I do . . .” said Rupert. “Read this letter, Count Zorndorff—it is from America—from Maier, your friend and . . . accomplice!”

“Rupert,” cried Cyrilla, greatly alarmed at this beginning; “I will not allow you to explain. Count Zorndorff shall hear from me alone how ungenerously I think he acted in . . . in taking advantage of the ignorance and fears of two helpless women!”

Rupert understood her pacific intentions, and felt that she was acting judiciously. An altercation with Zorndorff would at that moment have been worse than useless; for

a single glance at his agitated face and heaving chest convinced Rupert, not only that he keenly felt the pain of detection, but was for the moment overwhelmed by the annihilation of all his long-cherished plans.

Either to conceal his emotion, or to know how much of his guilt was betrayed, he turned to the nearest window and attempted to read the letter. The first few lines and the words "full confession," sufficed to extinguish his remaining hopes. He stamped violently two or three times with irrepressible rage, clutched the letter in his quivering hands, and then striking it against his forehead, held it there to hide the workings of features convulsed by the contending feelings of shame and disappointment; but his audibly short-drawn breath and heaving chest betrayed all the emotion he so vainly endeavoured to conceal; and even when at length he advanced towards Cyrilla, and attempted to speak, his tongue seemed to cleave to his lips, and he could at first only gasp out some scarcely articulate sounds.

Surprised and somewhat softened by this unexpected ebullition of feeling on the part of a man so little in the habit of being demonstrative, Rupert's features relaxed, and he walked quickly into the next room, and leaned out of a distant window, to avoid hearing the words of passionate pleading that afterwards flowed so unrestrainedly. Cyrilla listened passively to them and the succeeding attempts at exculpation; she did not even raise her eyes to those so anxiously bent on hers; but she evidently believed Zorndorff's assertion that he had gone to Salzburg when she was dangerously ill, in order to explain all and make her free, when, having heard that she was recovering, the sacrifice had been too great for him. He also assured her that in the last terrible interview she had had with his wife, he was so shocked at Margaret's despair, that he was again on the point of confession when she had become insensible, and, he continued, "had she lived I should also have had at least the merit of self-condemnation, and freely offered reparation—for the words she had overheard that fatal night admitted of no further reserve with her, nor

did I attempt any. She loved me, Cyrilla, and forgave not only all the wrong I had done her, but also—all I had meditated.”

Zorndorff paused before he added, in a constrained voice: “From you I dare not expect such clemency, and do not even think of asking forgiveness . . .”

“Take it, then, unasked,” said Cyrilla, yielding instantly to the impulse of a generous heart overflowing with happiness. “I am now,” she added, unconsciously glancing towards the open door of the other room, “much too happy to harbour anger—even against you. Let the past be forgotten, and our acquaintance begin again.”

He took her offered hand, and exclaimed, vehemently: “O, Cyrilla, had we been again united, the sole occupation of my life would have been an unceasing endeavour to make you forget . . .”

“Yes . . . yes; I am quite convinced of that,” she answered, hastily; “but you must allow me to repeat all you have said to Rupert;” and, anxious to avoid further discussion, she joined him, excused and defended Zorndorff with all the eagerness of fear; and, finally, having added some earnest entreaties, succeeded in persuading him to return to the breakfast-room to offer Zorndorff his hand and a total oblivion of the past.

Less solicitous of reconciliation with Rupert than Cyrilla had supposed, Zorndorff would scarcely have awaited the result of their conference had not his uncle entered the room to remind him of some papers and accounts which it was necessary to have in order on the 21st of the month. Any reference to what had occurred before the President was out of the question. Rupert, however, extended his hand when Zorndorff was about to leave; Cyrilla did the same, and the President, equally surprised and pleased at what he considered a demonstration of renewed friendship on her part, without hesitation requested his nephew to return in the evening.





CHAPTER L.

BY some process of reasoning which it is not necessary to follow, Zorndorff, in the course of a few hours, had fully persuaded himself that the “head and front of his offending” had been against his unhappy wife, and if she had thought proper to forgive him, no one else had a right to call him to account—that with regard to Cyrilla, he had insisted, perhaps, a little too rigorously on the fulfilment of vows, somewhat fraudulently obtained undoubtedly, but excusable on the part of a man so tried and tempted as he had been—and that, all things considered, he had more used than abused the power her timidity and reliance on his truth had given him. This view of the case enabled him to return to Freilands, meet his aunt without embarrassment, and inform her before they were long together of his opinion on the subject; adding, that his only subject of regret was the failure of a plan which would have enabled him to dedicate the remainder of his life to Cyrilla, and make amends for the imaginary wrongs which had so unfortunately estranged her from him! Then he repeated what he had said to Cyrilla, in extenuation of his offence, with even increased pathos; for his hearer, released from all apprehensions, now listened to him with her former interest and sympathy. In her idea the romantic fraud was already partially expiated when, instead of, as she had feared, threatening to revenge himself on his successful rival, he declared he

should penitently drag on the remainder of his wretched existence, a hopeless, aimless, blasted man!

Rupert and Cyrilla had soon after his arrival retired to the end room, taking it for granted that their presence must still embarrass if not annoy him. Rupert's gaiety and merry laugh were often stopped by Cyrilla, who, pointing anxiously to the door-way, entreated him to avoid irritating the vindictive man who was then within hearing. It was in vain he protested against further restraint; with tearful eyes she assured him her fears were still so unconquerable, that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to see him leave for Windhorst the very next day.

He thanked her with mock gravity for her kind wish to get rid of him; but assured her there was not the slightest chance of his leaving Exfort or its neighbourhood until she chose to go to Windhorst with him—the sooner, however, arrangements could be made for that purpose the better.

“You wilfully misunderstand me,” said Cyrilla, “or can you really not believe, that though I have now no fears on my own account, on yours they are increased a hundredfold?”

“I do believe you,” answered Rupert, smiling; “but assure you they are quite unfounded.”

“Will you at least promise never to refer to what occurred this morning in Count Zorndorff's presence?”

“Not the least danger of my doing so,” said Rupert: “you are sufficiently implicated to silence me for ever. I don't even like to think of it.”

“And you will also avoid everything else that could lead to an altercation or quarrel with him?”

“Undoubtedly; but now, dearest, let us talk of something else.”

Cyrilla was silenced, but not satisfied; her terror of Zorndorff was still so great, that on hearing him soon after approach with the President, she started up, intending to place herself as far away from her cousin as the limits of the room would permit.

“Stay, Cyrilla,” cried Rupert, catching her hand; “I

cannot permit this to continue any longer; there is no mystery, no promise now, and you are henceforward at liberty to sit beside and talk to me whenever you please."

She sat down, but in doing so removed her chair to a considerable distance.

Rupert rolled his in the same direction, and was laughing unrestrainedly at her face of alarm, when Melanie, followed by the President and Zorndorff, entered the room.

Zorndorff looked steadfastly and gloomily at them, and then with an unusual degree of formality took leave, passing even his uncle in one of the other rooms with a scarcely audible "Good-night."

His absence was a most evident relief to Cyrilla—she openly expressed her satisfaction at it, and also her surprise at his coming to Freilands after the occurrences of the morning. When informed by Melanie of his present view of his conduct, she was only restrained from a burst of indignation by the fear of provoking Rupert to anger, who, as it was, coloured violently, and observed, that Zorndorff had as usual managed to compel people to connive at his baseness, but he would some time or other become entangled in one of his complicated schemes, and be exposed to the infamy he deserved.

As the cousins afterwards sat together on the moonlit balcony, Rupert forming plans of future happiness, to which Cyrilla listened without offering even an amendment, they neither thought of nor saw the solitary man, who, in the deep shade of the nearest trees, gazed at them with an expression of such intense jealousy that his face, in all its perfect symmetry, might have been mistaken for that of a demon.

He was not seen that evening, or any of the following, when the sound of music and laughter seemed to excite him to frenzy—nor that last night when the Bellegardes were accompanied home, and the bright moonlight afterwards tempted to the lingering stroll in the lime-tree walk; but *he*, from his place of concealment, saw the parting afterwards—heard the good-night uttered in tones so soft and reluctant, that Melanie, who had been walking on before in

dignified abstraction, turned round, and observed, with a mixture of surprise and pleasure, "Why, Rupert, I do believe, after all, you can be as much in love, and as as"

"As foolishly fond as even *you* could desire," he said, laughing. "Not the smallest doubt of it, Melanie. I have only been waiting for an opportunity of exhibiting my talents in that way, for the last three years. I should not even mind walking up and down here in the moonlight, and saying, 'Good-night until it were to-morrow.'"

The sisters entered the house. Rupert looked after them until the door was closed, and then turned back into the avenue, and sauntered slowly in the direction of the lake.

* * * * *

At this, the happiest period of their lives, let us take leave of Rupert and Cyrilla. What remains to be told may be left to the imagination of the reader, who, it is to be hoped, will allow them as much enjoyment of this world as can reasonably be expected.

THE END.







